





The book cover is a vibrant pink color. It features several black line-art illustrations. On the left, there are vertical elements that look like stylized trees or perhaps hanging garments. In the upper right, a group of people is depicted in a social setting, with one person appearing to be dancing or in motion. At the bottom, there are more line drawings, including what looks like a small table with a bottle and a glass, and some other indistinct shapes. A large, solid black circle is positioned in the lower-middle part of the cover, containing the title text in white.

# COLONY DROP













# COLONY DROP PRESENTS LAST AMERICAN FANZINE 2: THE QUICKENING

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# *Pop Chaser.*

Words by BENJAMIN ETTINGER / Illustration by MARC MCKENZIE

One of the most unlikely classics of the OVA era in the 1980s is ***Pop Chaser*** (1985), the fourth entry in the long-running seminal home-viewing animated erotic entertainment series ***Cream Lemon***. Although *Pop Chaser* features some sexy scenes, it's an oddity in the series for any number of reasons.

The biggest reason is the quality of the animation. Whereas other *Cream Lemon* episodes are low-quality outings animated on a shoestring budget by a small team of one or two animators - and look the part - *Pop Chaser* is a lavishly animated extravaganza full of exhilarating action sequences and crazy, cartoonish antics.





The reason for the sudden surge in quality is the impressive animation crew that was gathered to produce the episode. Most of the other episodes either have no staff listing, or else two or three screens are enough to mention everyone. The credits for *Pop Chaser* are 1-1/2 minutes long, and there are no fewer than 24 key animators, most of whom are very impressive names that go a long way to accounting for the quality, including: Hideaki Anno, Mahiro Maeda, Toshiyuki Inoue, Masayuki, Yuji Moriyama, Shoichi Masuo, Hiroyuki Kitazume, Kazuaki Mouri, Hirotoishi Sano, Tsukasa Dokite, and Hiroshi Watanabe.

For a long time it was a mystery who many of the people in the credits were, because the staff roll is just an extension of the parody feeling of the show itself: each person in the credit uses a funny pen name. This is presumably because of the erotic material, but it's also true that many of them probably weren't supposed to be working on other studios' productions, so that may have been another factor. Not all of them felt such compunction, though, as some of the 'pen names' such as "One Toshiyuki Inoue" and "One Dokite" are quite thinly veiled indeed, and Hideaki Anno and Hiroshi Watanabe don't use a pen name at all. But with some research I was able to figure out many of the mystery names.

The biggest mystery name of them all was the director, someone named Dai Sakura, who not only directed but also created, wrote, storyboarded, and acted as sakkan (animation director). Everyone knows by now that this was in fact Hiroyuki Kitakubo, who is credited in a slight variation in the key animation credits under the non-pen name Hiroyuki Hikubo. (The character for "Hi" (比) closely resembles the character for "Kita" (北), so it's more a parody of a pen name.)

Ostensibly a pornographic cartoon, the odd thing about this anime is that it doesn't feel like pornography like the other *Cream Lemon* episodes do. There are two extended sex scenes, but when they arrive, they arrive with comic bluntness rather than seductive languor. It feels like a cheap but earnest porn video where there's been a half-assed attempt at drama for ten minutes, and they suddenly drop all pretense and abruptly jump into the sex. The other episodes actually make an earnest attempt to build character and story. Here the story is like a really fake-looking cardboard building edifice in a low-budget movie: they know they can't afford Hollywood, so they revel in the fakeness. You can sense that Kitakubo wasn't 'into' the sex scenes the way a lot of the other people who worked on *Cream Lemon* must have been, and was only doing them because he had to. The second sex scene is unmistakably comic rather than titillating. He's admitted he found doing the sex scenes to be the most boring part of the film, and I like how he tried to have some fun with them instead of doing them all serious and creepy.

When the lovemaking is over, the show transforms back into a science fiction/western/slapstick comedy about a lone girl gunman named Rio in some distant future who winds up rescuing a girl named Mai in a town overrun by outlaws who have killed all the previous sheriffs. Classic western setup. The show would function as a *Xabungle*-like sci-fi western without the lovemaking. *Puss 'n Boots II* was the first anime western, and *Pop Chaser* was the first porn anime western. Everything about it feels tongue-in-cheek and playful, from the exaggerated dust trail the bike dramatically kicks up at the beginning, to the exaggeratedly long love scene jarringly contrasted with wildly animated action, to the crazy bartender with his sailor fuku saloon. This episode was obviously just an excuse for a bunch of young animators to let off steam and have some fun. Typical of Kitakubo is that he packs in something in every shot. The directing itself is tight and clever. Despite being roughshod as a first effort, the episode still has that distinguishing Kitakubo attention to detail and density of animation.



The big love scene at the middle of the episode between Mai and Rio feels strangely parodic despite its classy atmosphere. At the very least, it feels different in character from the erotic scenes in the rest of *Cream Lemon*. It's not played as a joke per se, but the sheer, interminable length of the proceedings - 6 excruciatingly slow minutes of petting and licking - and the clinical drawings and languorous cinematography make the scene feel uncomfortably and awkwardly intimate rather than titillating.

The love scene at the end begins seriously, with the kidnapper having sex with his victim Mai in his mecha, but turns into bawdy comedy when Rio charges in on her hoverbike to rescue Mai, and he has to fight back with Mai still 'attached'. "How did you change position?!" is one of the funniest lines to grace an anime. This leads into a well-paced little climactic action scene that makes for fun viewing even after all these years, with its lively and playful mecha action and funny character deformation.

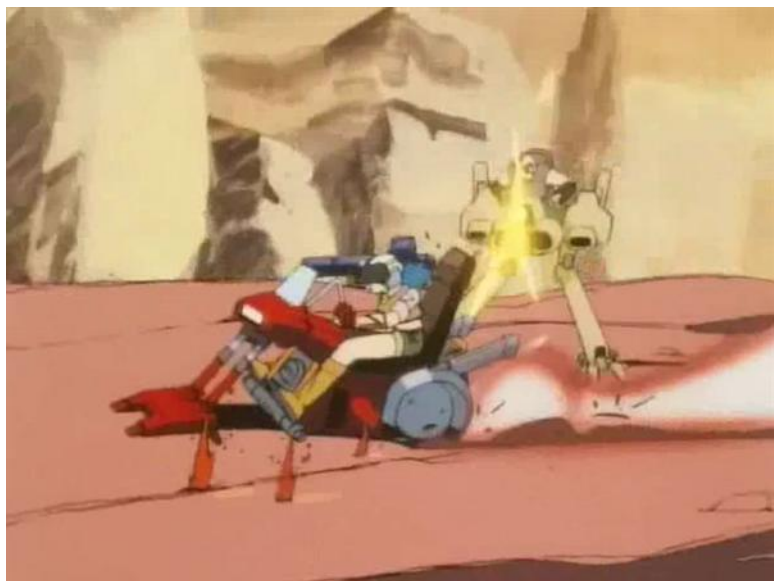
Technically speaking, *Pop Chaser* is the least pornographic entry in *Cream Lemon*. Unlike the other episodes, which feature explicit depictions of female genitalia and penetration, only breasts are shown in *Pop Chaser*. No mosaics were deemed required by the Japanese censors, as were required in other episodes. The film achieves the feat of being prurient without being explicit.

Testament to how unique the film is, depending on who you ask, the episode was either not erotic at all and didn't work as pornography, but was tremendously fun to watch, or was a mess as a film and failed as entertainment, but was a hell of a turn on to watch.

As a film, it doesn't stand up to scrutiny, for any number of obvious reasons: Even the crappier *Cream Lemon* episodes had better character development. The whole first half of the episode seems completely wasted in boring, sluggish exposition. The love scene at the middle comes out of nowhere and drags on for way too long. Rio has no motivation to go charging after Mai like that. Like many Kitakubo films, he's good at depicting an exciting sequence of events, but the characters are paper-thin and there's no feeling of a grander scheme of things; there's an almost autistic focus on mechanically pursuing details to the detriment of substance.

You could chalk the film's shortcomings up to the missteps of a first-time director, since Kitakubo had no directing experience, but I don't think he cared about the story so much as just wanted to make a crazy bash. Having just debuted as a key animator the year before, with only two gigs under his belt, here he dived head-first into directing, creating the whole story himself as well as storyboarding it, directing it, and supervising the animation. It was quite a debut at such a young and inexperienced age, and it's still more fun to watch than many better produced anime titles.

The fact that Kitakubo was not part of the *Cream Lemon* crowd and approached the job from the perspective of an outsider is what saves the episode and actually makes it watchable to normal people, with funny gags and cool mecha action and jokey, absurd sex scenes. The same can't be said for most hentai anime, which are usually just skin-crawlingly creepy to watch unless you're one of 'those people'







It's thanks to the great animators Kitakubo managed to corral that this episode looks so nice. It seems likely that he just picked out the talented people who had either worked on the small handful of shows he had worked on by that early point in his career, or who had done good work in other recent shows. I don't know what weight he carried at such an early stage in his career to get such an impressive array of names on board, but I respect that even on a throwaway project like this, the animation was his first priority, as it has been on everything else he's done since.

Kitakubo had worked on *Gu Gu Ganmo* alongside Toshiyuki Inoue, who animated the beautifully drawn 6-minute lesbian love scene, and on *Urusei Yatsura* alongside Yuji Moriyama, who was actually part of the small artistic collective "Studio MIN" that Kitakubo formed in 1982. Although co-credited as character designer, Yuji Moriyama was in fact the sub-character designer.

Masayuki and Kazuaki Mouri had done great work on *Sasuga no Sarutobi*. Shoichi Masuo had done great work on *Orguss*. The three of them undoubtedly helped animate the climactic battle scene. Masuo, at the very least, drew the great 7-second shot of Rio zooming around dodging enemies in the climactic battle. There are a lots of shots by Masuo in *Orguss* that are equally impressive and worth seeking out.

Other animators were brought onboard due to personal connections. Mahiro Maeda was a classmate of Kitakubo's at Tokyo Zokei University as was Yoshiyuki Sadamoto, who alongside with Maeda went on to co-design Kitakubo's *Robot Carnival* short in 1987. Kazuaki Mouri also returned to help Kitakubo animate his *Robot Carnival* short (which was 70% animated by Kitakubo).

Incidentally, about the pen names, Masayuki's pen name "Kaminari Neko no O.P." translates as "The O.P. of *Thundercats*", which Masayuki had animated just before. Kazuaki Mouri's pen name Enya Eizo comes from the fact that he was a big tokusatsu fan, in honor of *Godzilla* director Enya Eiichi.



A.P.P. stands for Another Push Pin Planning. It was founded in 1984 by ex-Mushi Pro director Kazufumi Nomura. Kitakubo continued to work for them, going on to direct a segment in *Robot Carnival* (1987), *Rojin Z* (1991), *Jojo's Bizarre Adventure* (1993-1994), and *Golden Boy* (1995-1996), each of which is masterfully produced and superbly entertaining. Too bad this studio doesn't appear to do original projects anymore.

Released in 16 episodes and several offshoots between 1984 and 1986, *Cream Lemon*'s significance reaches well beyond *Pop Chaser*. *Cream Lemon* wasn't the first adult anime, but it was the pioneer in the erotic home-video anime market, and it influenced things to come in various ways, although it can be a bit of a chicken-and-egg proposal to distinguish how it did so, as *Cream Lemon* both followed as well as influenced the trends in consumer demand.

The salient thing about anime since *Cream Lemon* is how the erotic element has gradually come to permeate more and more of non-pornographic anime. *Cream Lemon* helped pave the way for this, though in the end if they hadn't done it, someone else would have.

Erotic art has a long history in Japan, with its famous Shunga woodblock prints. Indeed, erotic art in everyday life has been found in most cultures throughout the world at one time or another, from 30,000-year-old cave-paintings of vulvas with a religious significance to the Turin erotic papyrus, known as 'the first men's mag', created in Egypt around 1000BCE, to the explicitly sexual and erotic imagery on vases and murals in ancient Greece. The puritanical turn of mind that restricts pornographic images today was largely a Victorian construct.

So in a sense, it could be argued that the prevalence of the erotic element in anime today in the form of mildly erotic (but not pornographic) 'moé' anime is more true to human nature, and its absence in other animation markets is unnatural. But the motivation for the eroticism in anime seems to me diametrically opposed to the matter-of-fact acceptance of sexuality of old, serving more as an escape from human social and physical contact resulting from the social apathy and anomie of today's Japanese youth.

Porno movies began emerging in the 1960s in Japan in competition for TV audiences looking for more scandalous and outre material proscribed on the airwaves. The first official animated film for adults in Japan came out in 1969 with Mushi Pro's *1001 Nights*. This resulted in a rush of adult-themed feature-length animation in the ensuing years, but this turned out to be something of an anomaly, and never developed into a trend. After the copycat *Ukiyo-e 1001 Nights* in October of 1969, touted as moving Shunga, Mushi Pro followed up with the variety-show of *Cleopatra* in 1970, which itself was followed by yet another copycat in the form of Yasuji's *Pornorama* in 1971. *Belladonna* in 1973 rung something of the death knell of feature-length adult animation in Japan, albeit a beautiful death knell. Erotic cartoons waited a decade to return in a different form. The difference with later direct-to-video hentai anime is that these films were not pornography; they were merely erotic, at most.

Adult art has found its way into every medium of human artistic endeavor, usually sooner than later, and the video market was no exception. Even before *1001 Nights*, apparently some scamp had made an adult cartoon in Japan in the 1930s, although it never received any sort of distribution.







The period of time from the 1970s to early 1980s in Japan is referred to as the “anime boom” - the period when anime became respectable in Japan, and ceased to be viewed as the exclusive purview of children. The previous generation had paved the way for this boom by doing essentially the same thing for manga. Gekiga manga from Shirato Sanpei and the like made manga respectable for adults. This generation also invented sci-fi conventions, creating a fan community of like-minded geeks. The appearance of hard-boiled sci-fi anime like *Space Battleship Yamato* bridged the gap between these generations. Con culture celebrated fan participation in pop culture with dojinshi art placing their favorite characters in erotic situations in the vein of slash fiction in the west. The appearance of the magazine *Animage* in 1978 was one of the crystallizing moments of these various tendencies, bringing together anime fans under the same banner for the first time.

1980s bubble affluence combined with the prevalence of anime and the emergence of consumer media like video decks allowed fans to indulge and obsess in their interests like never before. This spoiled generation of kids born between 1960 and 1970 who grew up in the 1980s and 1990s were known as the “shinjinrui” or “new breed”. The emergence of games like *Super Mario Brothers* in 1985 added game culture to the ferment of geek culture that these kids breathed. It was this decadent environment, with its vacuum of erotic content filled by fan fantasy, that hatched the notion of lolicon anime of which *Cream Lemon* happened to seize the crown of pioneer.

Manga artist Hideo Azuma had helped create a boom for ‘lolicon’ style comics as the creator of first lolicon dojinshi in the late 1970s, many of the staff of which went on to work on the pioneering lolicon magazine *Lemon People*, which ran from 1982 to 1999, and which lent much of its talent directly to *Cream Lemon*.

Technically, *Cream Lemon* was not even the first direct-to-video porno anime. The first ero anime was a one-shot called *Shoujo Bara Kei* released February 1984. It was in a more ‘realistic’ (less cartoony) gekiga style that (unsurprisingly) did not prove popular. This is where *Cream Lemon* stepped in and in August 1984 became a hit with its cute, cartoony style that slaked swelling fan demand for this material to make the transition from dojinshi to moving drawings.

The character Ami from episode 1 may in fact be first moé character, before the term moé was invented, as she went on to gain such popularity among fans as a character (not as a porno anime) as to merit a full-fledged media mix strategy including several continuation episodes, records, radio shows and even a short full-fledged non-pornographic theatrical short accompanying *Cream Lemon* production company A.P.P.’s follow-up feature *Project A-Ko* (1986) - which incidentally was originally planned as part of *Cream Lemon*, complete with dirty scenes that were excised when the project inflated to theatrical proportions.



The genius of the concept of moé is that, deep-down, it's a very basic and conventional idea no different from Sanrio or Disney: It's about selling characters. If we think pornography taps a deep-rooted urge, moé goes even deeper by profiting off of the human need for attachment and love. Ami exemplifies the way *Cream Lemon* began to go beyond porn by creating emotional attachment to characters in addition to lust for them. If, after pleasuring yourself, you're still interested in the character, you know it's moé.

Unlike pornography, which is utilitarian and ancillary to real life, in this equation, every incentive lies with promoting the coddled, hermetic cocoon-building mentality that developed in the 1980s with the shinjinrui, rather than promoting them to go out and seek human contact. Moé is defined by its abnormal level of interest in an imaginary character or idol who is physically incapable of reciprocating feelings of love. A society that allows its youth to marry dakimakura seems far more perverse than one that openly promotes sex and affection with other human beings.

Aside from staging the coup of taking the top spot in the history of lolicon anime, *Cream Lemon* episode 3 also holds the honor of being the first tentacle rape anime. It was released December 1984, two years before *Guyver*, which is sometimes claimed as the first tentacle rape anime. Ironically, this was one of the few episodes with actual graphic depiction of female genitalia that was not censored. Why on earth would they censor other episodes but not this quite grotesque episode? Because it didn't involve two human organs. This feat of logic apparently still applied by the time of *Urotsukidoji*, which was able to be released uncensored, undoubtedly helping sales considerably.

*Cream Lemon's* influence also extends to the way novel versions were written based on the anime due to the show's popularity. These novels paved the way for light novel market that is intrinsically tied to today's moé anime industry.

AIC, which was apparently involved with the production of *Cream Lemon* alongside A.P.P. even though it is not credited, went on to release continuations of *Cream Lemon* and to become one of the leaders in this new market, and they remain so today. Indeed, episode 7 and 12 of *Cream Lemon* feature some of the earliest directing work by Toshihiro Hirano, with drawings by his wife, Narumi Kakinouchi, both under nominal pen-names. This may have been the first thing that both of them did after moving to AIC from Artland, right before Toshihiro Hirano directed his famous *Fight!! Iczer-1* OVAs for AIC.

The other *Cream Lemon* episodes are mostly low-quality work not worth re-visiting, although they do adopt a variety of different designs and narrative styles in each episode. The only spot of nice animation anywhere else in the rest of the series comes in episode 10 with some nice space action courtesy of Tamura Hideki, one of the best Kanada-school animators of this period, under the pen name Mizu Makura.





# CREAM LEMON EPISODE 4: POP CHASER

(OVA, MARCH 1985, 27 MINS)

**Creator, Scenario, Storyboard, Director, Animation Director:** Dai Sakura (佐倉大)  
**Character Design:** Dai Sakura (佐倉大), Yuji Motoyama (もとやま ゆうじ)

Key Animators' Names as They Appear in Credits		Real Name	
たんくくんた	Kunta Tanku		
もとやまゆうじ	Yuji Motoyama	森山雄治	Yuji Moriyama
小山内宏	Hiroshi Koyamauchi		
水越薫	Kaoru Mizugoshi		
○島×彦(仮名)	_hiko _jima (pseudonym)	西島克彦	Katsuhiko Nishijima
TAKASHI	TAKASHI	赤石沢貴士	Takashi Akaishizawa
前田明	Akira Maeda	前田真宏	Mahiro Maeda
ぬるちひろこ	Hiruko Nuruchi	増尾昭一	Shoichi Masuo
チャノチロトシ	Chirotochi Chano	佐野浩敏	Hirotochi Sano
大木金太郎	Kintaro Daiki	大貫健一	Kenichi Onuki
綾歌軍	Gun Ayaka		
家紋我路	Garo Kamon	北爪宏幸	Hiroyuki Kitazume
住友太郎	Taro Sumitomo		
ゴータ君	Goda-kun	合田浩章	Hiroaki Goda
比久保弘之	Hiroyuki Hikubo	北久保 弘之	Hiroyuki Kitakubo
かみなりねこのO.P.	Kaminari Neko's O.P.	摩砂雪	Masayuki
某、井上俊之	One Toshiyuki Inoue	井上俊之	Toshiyuki Inoue
鳥本起矢	Tatsuya Torimoto	真行寺たつや	Tatsuya Shingyoji
大広間由美	Yumi Ohiroma		
土器手某	One Dokite	土器手司	Tsukasa Dokite
あんのひであき	Hideaki Anno	庵野秀明	Hideaki Anno
円谷映三	Eizo Enya	毛利和昭	Kazuaki Mouri
垂呂沢秀部	Hidebe Arosawa	金沢比呂司	Hiroshi Kanezawa?
渡辺浩	Hiroshi Watanabe	渡辺浩	Hiroshi Watanabe





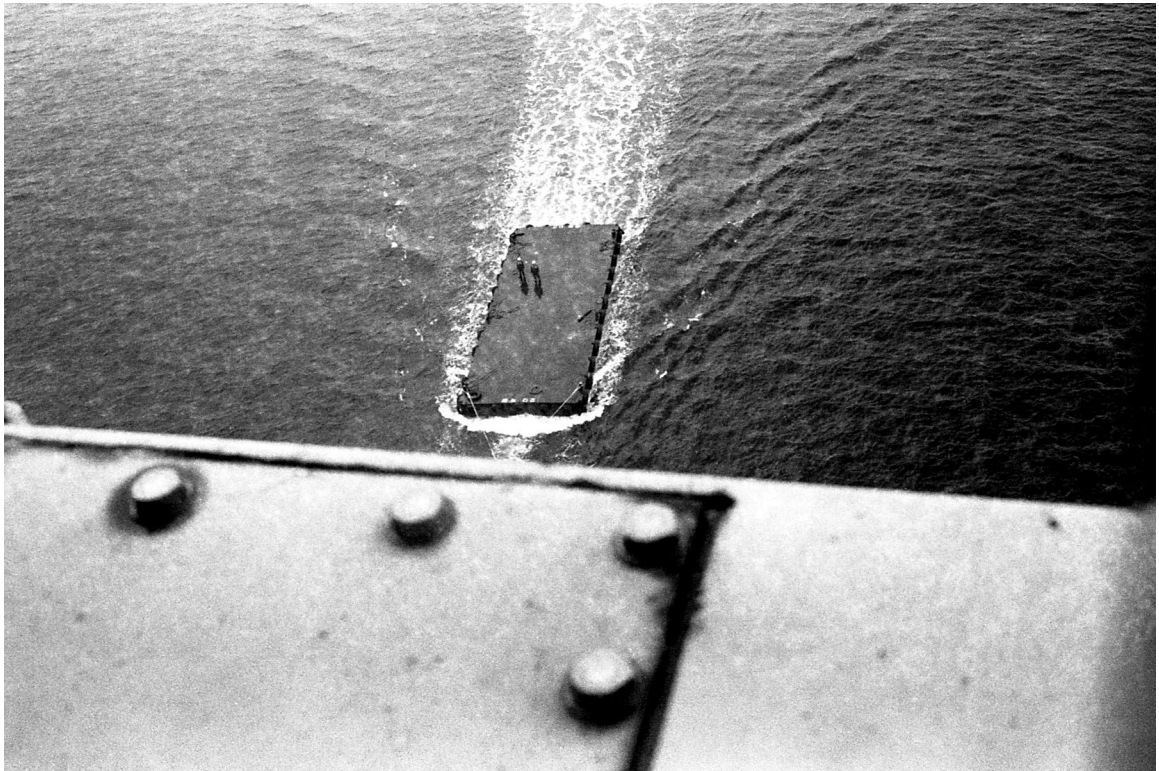




*Tokyo Bay's  
Reclaimed Land:*  
***THE REAL LIFE  
PATLABOR***

Words and Photos by MATT SCHLEY





*“[Captain Nagumo] was on the fast track, rising up the ranks of the Security Bureau. But instead she got exiled to a strip of reclaimed land.”*  
 – CAPTAIN GOTO, *PATLABOR 2*

That strip of reclaimed land, the main setting for *Patlabor* – the franchise about scrappy but lovable mobile suit-using police officers protecting Tokyo from rampaging robots called Labors – lies, specifically, in Tokyo Bay, between an artificial island called Jonanjima, the home of one of cramped Tokyo’s only campgrounds, and Tokyo International Airport, aka Haneda, itself built on reclaimed land.

To someone from one hundred years ago, Tokyo Bay would be unrecognizable. Transformed by decades of ambitious land reclamation, a process where new land is created by literally filling in the sea, the bay has transformed into a sprawling artificial landmass, feeding the industrial, commercial and residential needs of the biggest city in the world.

Tokyo Bay isn’t just the setting of *Patlabor*. The real-life story of Tokyo Bay mirrors *Patlabor*’s: Both are about the hubristic use of technology and the inevitable consequences of that use – of humans creating something they can’t quite control.

The very term “land reclamation” has a fair bit of hubris baked in: the “re” is a misnomer, considering there was never any land there to begin with. The first trial run for what might more accurately be called “land clamation” took place in the early 1600s, when Tokyo was still called Edo, and shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu ordered an entire mountain leveled in order to fill part of the bay and create a port near his castle.

It’s hard to believe looking out at today’s endless concrete horizon, but Tokyo was once a great canal city on par with Venice. A late Edo period book describes “boats paddling away, floating by leisurely, others mooring; it is impossible to see the river surface.” As the city developed and paved roads replaced canals as the chief mode of transportation, these rivers were filled with concrete or left to funnel refuse. The shogun’s creation of an artificial port was the first step in filling in Tokyo’s once-beloved canals.

But land reclamation in the bay didn’t ramp up on its modern scale until after two major periods of destruction: the 1923 Tokyo earthquake, which leveled most of the city, and the 1945 fire bombings, which did much the same thing.

The period of reclamation which started in the 1950s, specifically, was fueled by the post-war “economic miracle” and the need to create new land for factories and new ports to export these factories’ goods. Unlike post-WWII Europe, Japan’s planning authorities were less interested in modern ideas about urban planning and more interested in pure economic results. As a consequence, land reclamation and construction surged forward with little regulation and only basic zoning requirements, explaining in part why the Tokyo Bay area looks like such a tangled mess.





While the reality was to become an ever-growing, out-of-control sprawl, there were a group of dreamers in the early 60s at work on their own, more utopian visions of Tokyo Bay. Specifically, a group of architects and designers called Metabolism, who would eventually design much of the famed Osaka Expo '70, were drawing up radical plans for the bay, including one design called "Marine City," which featured huge self-contained, silo-like skyscrapers rising from concrete bases in the bay, and a separate, large-scale plan with a name guaranteed to pique the interest of readers of this fanzine: "Neo-Tokyo."

In reality, reclamation plodded along in a distinctly non-utopian way. In the late 60s, the focus of expansion turned from factories and ports to the creation of more housing for Tokyo's ever-increasing population, creating many commuter "bedroom communities" in Tokyo and its neighboring prefecture, Chiba. But the bay isn't without its utopian touches. Among the artificial islands, for example, is Yumenoshima, the Island of Dreams, a somewhat perverse name for a place composed entirely of trash. Yumenoshima, a unique solution for Tokyo's garbage problem, is now covered with topsoil and hosts a sports park and a greenhouse, unrecognizable as a trash heap by anyone who doesn't know its history.

Odaiba, perhaps the bay's most famous artificial island, started life as a series of defensive turrets built after the first visit and show of naval might by the American Commodore Perry and his so-called Black Ships. In the early 1990s, it became the site of an ambitious project by Tokyo Governor Suzuki Shunichi to create a futuristic housing and commercial development called Tokyo Teleport Town. The collapse of the bubble economy stopped that plan short, but Odaiba has since become the home of various shopping centers, the headquarters of Fuji Television (a building designed by one of the founders of Metabolism), and the famous life-size *Gundam* statue.

*Patlabor's* Babylon Project is an extension of these ambitious bubble economy-era ideas. The Babylon Project, as explained in the first *Patlabor* film, is a public works project that aims, with the help of Labor technology, to completely fill in Tokyo Bay and provide additional housing and commercial lands for the 21st century.

It's science fiction, but it's not crazy. The helicopter pilot at the beginning of the film, whose thankless job it is to deliver exposition to the sleeping Shinohara and Izumi, mentions that the new space available after the project is complete will be 45,000 hectares – that's a big number, but it's only twice the land that has actually been added to the bay since reclamation began. Had the economy not gone south, it's not unreasonable to assume something like the Babylon Project might have happened.





But *Patlabor 2*, made a few years later, more accurately reflects the post-bubble reality. The terrorists in that film make their camp on Reclaimed Island #18, a fictional piece of land just south of Tokyo Bay's outermost landfill. The fact that Reclaimed Island #18, or anything in its place, hasn't been built in the 20 years since *Patlabor 2* speaks to the slowdown of reclamation, and building overall, since the bubble years.

As in any good tale of human hubris, the story of both *Patlabor*'s Tokyo Bay and its real-life equivalent end with some serious warnings about the limits of our technology.

In the first *Patlabor* film, the Babylon Project is dealt a major setback when it turns out the Ark, one of its major components, serves as a kind of amplifier for a signal that causes Labors to go berserk. Our heroes are left with no choice but to destroy the Ark, a hubristically-named construction if there ever was one. The film's message seems to be a warning against quick and unchecked expansion.

In reality, it was the March 11th, 2011 earthquake that tested the limits of man-made land. Urayasu, a city in Chiba artificially extended into the bay in order to host Tokyo Disneyland, was rocked by the 9.0 magnitude earthquake in Tohoku, experiencing severe liquefaction, a phenomenon where the sand underground mixes with groundwater, becoming unstable. Essentially, the previously-stable soil becomes soft, turning into a kind of quicksand, causing buildings to tilt and sway. 9,000 buildings in Urayasu, as well as the water supply and sewer systems, were damaged. Disney's parking lot turned into a swamp, and 20,000 visitors were forced to stay in the park overnight. Repair, as of October 2012, is expected to take another three years. All that from an earthquake with an epicenter 175 miles away.

It's hard to overstate how vastly the reclamation of Tokyo Bay has altered its landscape. Land reclaimed since the Meiji era comprises 24,000 hectares, or about 100 square miles, and 95% of the coastline is artificial.

None of these numbers describes what it actually feels like to walk around these strips of reclaimed land, which is: weird. There are developed spots, like Odaiba, but even there, take one step off the proscribed tourist path and feels, compared to the busy, filled-out Tokyo you've just come from, bizarrely empty. The feeling only increases once you wander the other, less famous islands, where there's little to be seen but rows of cheap housing complexes, piles of refuse, and old men with their fishing poles in the river, all with the city's newest symbol of hubris, Tokyo Skytree, looming in the background.

And it's only here on the artificial banks of the bay – artificial banks that, instead of flowing gradually into the sea, all end in a sudden 90 degree slope – it's only here you're reminded Tokyo is a city connected to the sea.







# APPROACHES TO JOURNALISM IN THE 21ST CENTURY.

Words by RENATO RIVERA / Photos by MATT SCHLEY

Ryryota Fujitsu and Keisuke Hirota are writers on the topic of anime in Japan – as such, there are diverse avenues for their insights to appear in: aside from the usual magazine articles and serial columns, they partake in various media activities such as Fujitsu's radio show on NHK, *Shibuya Anime Land*, and Hirota's involvement on the creative side (he wrote scripts for *Sousei no Aquarion* radio dramas).

So what's the problem?



Well, at the same time, “anime journalism,” or what can be inferred to as such, is, within Japan, generally limited in its scope as doing not much more than promote a certain product – in most cases an upcoming/currently airing TV series – and “report” on its developing status through insider information gained from staff interviews and the like. Rather than investigative journalism or critique, however, we find that this idea of anime reporting is in fact a product of not-always-cozy bedfellows: the publisher, the PR department of the production as well as the production committee itself.

The production committee system was implemented for the main purpose of shifting the balance of power away from the sponsors of TV animation who were concerned with utilizing these shows as a form of advertising for their products. These sponsors were, in the early days of TV animation, originally confectionery companies such as Meiji (*Tetsuwan Atom*), Glico (*Tetsujin 28-gou*), and even Calpis (*Alps no Shoujo Heidi*). These shifted to toy companies towards the late 1970s and early 1980s. It has already been seen how these toy companies had enormous influence on the story and elements of the shows in question. However, the more radical creators were more than happy to bite the hand that fed them if it meant a rather more dynamic result in terms of show content. This led to an eventual rift.

As more and more sponsors were pulling out of productions, leaving their shows to face cancellation (*Gundam*, *Layzner*, etc.) and the OVA market gradually took over in hardcore sci-fi action categories, the “product” shifted once again, this time from toys to the animation as product itself. Today we are left with the legacy of the OVA market – late-night television broadcasts of animation which serve as advertising for the eventual DVD or Blu-Ray “complete” release. It is in everyone’s interests to ensure that these products help recoup the “chip-in style” investments across the board, and as a bridge of information flow to the end-user, the anime magazines cannot afford to be critical. As a result, the content within those pages may not really be the most fair and balanced, and for some, it is the source of much stress and frustration.

The following is a transcript of a discussion concerning the changing scene of “anime journalism” in Japan, held specially for this publication on March 7th, 2012, at a Chinese tea lounge in Dogenzaka, Shibuya.

Rivera: OK, right then, let’s begin with quick introductions...

Hirota: I’m Hirota, a freelance writer.

Fujitsu: My name is Fujitsu. I’m an anime critic. Actually, we both had a long-running regular column together in *Great Mechanics DX* magazine called “Oyaji no Sakaba [Old Men’s Watering Hole],” where we just chatted about anime.

H: We talked about live-action movies, too.

R: That’s right. But you had met before, yes?

H: Yeah, I think it was during *Spirited Away*.

F: Yes, we worked together. But then not much after that... I started to notice Hirota’s name on *SPA!* and he was writing about *Gasaraki*, and [*Cowboy*] *Bebop*...

H: Yeah, around that time I was doing a weekly thing with Bandai Visual. And it was then that I put out a book...

F: *Super Robot Complex*.

H: And after more than a decade, I’m writing another one now...

F: That’s great. Who’s bringing it out?

H: It’s Ichijinsha. The title is *Ore no Kanchou* [My Captain], and it is basically about the concept of the “captains” in anime like *Yamato* and *Macross*. It also includes columns about others like Tyler, Unicorn, etc.

F: Mostly targeting male readership...?

H: Yes, the late-thirties, early-forties crowd.

R: Thanks for joining me today; I would like to move on to talk about our main topic today. Firstly, Fujitsu, even though I knew about you from your books and columns, we first met only last year at [the Japan Animation Studies Society Conference held at] Kyoto Seika University. Do you often make such academic presentations of your findings?

F: No, that was my first time. I’d like to go again this year if I have the opportunity.

R: I think the data you presented is invaluable.

F: Yes, I believe it’s important to provide figures and statistics relevant to TV anime so that other researchers can use these data sets as a base which would lead to further findings. I try to do that while correcting some inaccurate figures in order to make ground for critique to take place. That’s something I started doing a few years back on the web, looking at past ratings and schedules to read the trends in anime. I was later invited to give a talk at an academic conference in order for this to be used more effectively. That’s when I used the data to ascertain when the main anime boom occurred and to back the claim that it indeed peaked in 1983, dropping off in late 1984, beginning of 1985. But anyway, that’s not my main job, what I normally do is similar to Hirota, I mostly go out and write articles for magazines.

R: Hirota, you have written a lot of critical pieces, but also promotional material. So these are all different approaches in terms of writing, but we can say that in order to paint an accurate overall picture of the Japanese animation industry using the written word and print media, we must first combine all of these approaches. However, I feel that there are several obstacles to this. That is what I would mainly like to talk about today. So firstly, Hirota, tell us from a journalistic point of view... When you go and conduct research, analyze and write about a particular anime, submit the manuscript, and then find that certain changes have been made...

H: Yes, it happens a lot. Especially in the case where it’s an article about a show currently airing, the publicity head of the “maker” company has to proofread it, and since their agenda is to sell the product, I cannot just write anything. Even if I am choosing my words carefully, they sometimes say “this expression here is no good,” etc.

R: [holding up a copy of *Gekkan Out* magazine from 1978] I think I’ve shown you this before... This is an old issue of *Out*.



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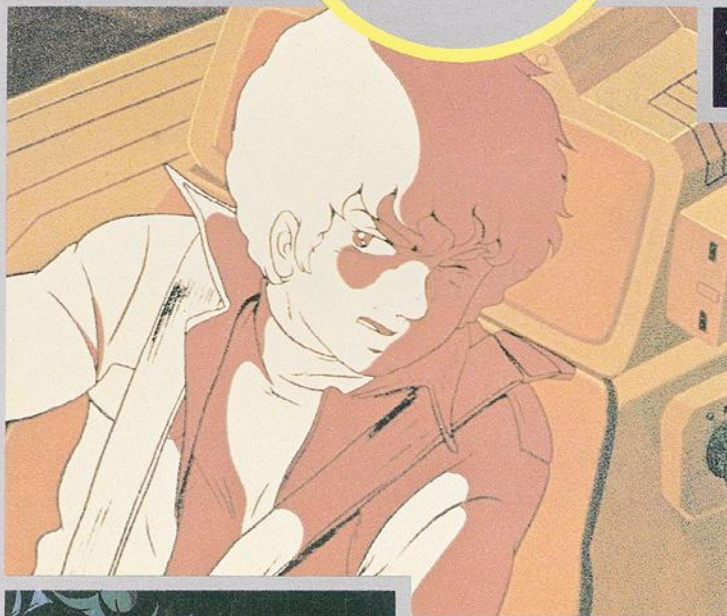
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アウト

アウト



——夏から秋…  
アニメ前線に異常あり？



**白熱！アニメ最前線！**

Ⅰ 総括！夏の劇場用アニメ——

Ⅱ 特報！秋のTV新番・特番——

——特別ふろく  
浪花愛のレターセット



Out, November 1981



H: Heh, I want that!

F: [laughs]

R: This contains a special feature on Studio Nue. When I showed it to you, I believe you mentioned that some of the page layout choices would not fly today – like, this picture would never be on the same page as this picture like it is here [referring to several images of designs which, although all had Studio Nue involvement, were copyrighted by different companies].

H: Because they belong to different shows.

R: So you can't mix them on the same page.

H: Well, if you explain clearly the intent of the article or feature during the planning stage, they do allow you to do that sometimes. For example, I recently did a feature in EX Taishuu where I compared a real-world timeline with a sci-fi anime timeline [made up of key events from many different shows]. They let me do that because they understood that that was the main point of the article. But for example, I'm writing about the new Shaft show *Nisemonogatari* in *Otona Anime* magazine now, and interviewing [Akiyuki] Shinbo, the director, about what else he has done. Since the companies involved are different, they tell me not to write about the other shows he has worked on. So I have to figure out who has greater authority.

R: But there were no issues with the EX Taishuu one?

H: No, because for starters, most of the shows I talked about had long finished airing. The main issue for them is that the shows are their current product. Also, the EX article was planned as what it was from the beginning, and not a promotional piece.

F: Basically, for them, it was clear why there was a need to mix all these shows together.

H: Right. Whereas in *Otona Anime*, they come up to me and say, "OK, we have a Blu-Ray of this current show coming out soon, so let's think of something to put in here." So obviously they don't want to have me talking about other shows in that space. From my point of view, it's the same staff, so of course other shows are going to come into the context and there is a need for me to refer to them, but the "makers" don't see it that way.

R: How much room do you have to negotiate that?

H: Depends... It's mostly a problem for current shows, though. You are very constrained in what you can write when you're talking about a company's product currently on the market. It's been like that since the late 90s, when I was writing articles for *SPA!* I would write about what I liked and Bandai Visual would sponsor the page because they saw it as a promotional opportunity, but then that meant that I was limited at times – essentially, I couldn't write anything negative.

R: Are there any recent articles which have been rejected?

H: Well, I think I know how to reign myself in at this point, so there haven't been any which have been cancelled outright... but there are the occasional ones which are rewritten in a strange way. Like the one about *Nisemonogatari*. I was writing about that one since before it aired, so obviously it's for promotion. Now, *Nisemonogatari* is a sequel to *Bakemonogatari*, right? So of course I have to mention *Bakemonogatari*, but Shaft told me not to write about that.

F: That's because the staff changed, right? The director is different... You can't talk about Oishi [Tatsuya Oishi was the series director for *Bakemonogatari* but not involved in *Nisemonogatari*] because it will confuse things since he is working on *Kizumonogatari*.

H: [Laughs] Right, exactly.

R: So when they told you not to write about that, did they give any reason?

H: No. Just that this was supposed to be a piece about *Nisemonogatari*. My view was that they should have said that in the first place. And anyway, it's impossible to ignore the other works when you're talking about a sequel.

R: Fujitsu, do you have any such experiences?

F: Not as much as Hirota, but yes, I do. But then, when I write a piece for an anime magazine, I don't try and fight for justice or anything, I just try and do the job, and hope it turns out well.

R: And for columns?

F: In columns I just aim to write what I want, and in order to keep being able to do that, I need to do several things, including writing articles for anime magazines. As of this year I have been doing a lot of work for *Newtype*, but prior to that, I actually haven't written that much for anime magazines. In fact, the last main pieces of writing I did for those were probably for *Eureka Seven* in *Animage*. So that was around seven years ago now. At the moment I'm doing material for *Momo e no Tegami* and *009 Re: Cyborg* in *Newtype*. I've noticed though that my serial articles aren't that popular, so they end after about three installments. Like *Shangri-La*, for example.

H: *Shangri-La*... [laughs]

F: Yeah. I covered *Panty & Stocking*, too, and that also only lasted for three issues. But in any case, I tend not to go into too much detail about the complexities of the show, etc...

R: OK, well, let's put *Momo e no Tegami* aside for a second and talk about *Re: Cyborg* – in that case, you obviously have to talk about the original *Cyborg 009*, right?

F: Well, this is the way it works. It's not just a case of comparing the two. Unlike straight up advertising, the companies contact the editorial, and together they plan out how they are going to market this movie. So, instead of me going off and writing my own thing, then waiting for either an OK or a no-go, it's a much more intimate relationship. So instead of what I want...

H: ...It's what the "makers" want?

F: It's what the editors want. That's the priority, and we have to respect their wishes.

R: You have no freedom?



F: No, it's not that we don't have freedom... Rather, I think what you can do within the pages of an anime magazine is... Well, Hirota, I think it's great that you're trying hard to open up more possibilities there, but in my case, I prefer to keep low. What you can do in an anime magazine is very limited. I go in already with the mindset that I can't fully express the complex issues I observe, so I try to just do the best interview I can and put out the best article I can in the hope of supporting the show, which is what I prioritize. Now, I'm not going to disagree that there are some really stubborn "maker" companies, but in order for me to get to the real critical pieces that I want to write, I believe that now is the time to make allies. That may take five, ten, twenty years. It might take me my whole life just to make allies. But I think that only then will people be able to healthily argue and not fall out with each other. Up to now, there has been no real "anime critique." It has just been made-to-order articles. If I can get more people to start to think that certain works of writing – whether they can or can't be used as advertising – can prove positive to the understanding of a certain work, then we can all start to get along.

R: But the TV anime industry is already around 50 years old... Isn't it strange that there hasn't been established a proper venue for critique yet?

F: Not really. Think about it historically. For example, manga critique, we're talking only about 10 years or so that it has existed due to the sheer number of titles published. On the other hand, animation is still just a sub-genre, and a very young one at that. Modern art, movies, manga: they were all sub-genres. If you look at *Kinema Junpo* [the movie magazine], they do have people in there who know a lot about anime, but historically, there hasn't been a proper volume on Japanese animation. There was just no "critique scene" for animation up until now, and I do not think that is strange. In fact, the idea that anime is not just for kids has itself only been around for a little over 30 years. In the case of movies, critique came about because their birth coincided with the industrial revolution and the rise of capitalism in society, but for most forms of expression like literature and fine arts – besides being highly significant that the creator is usually a single individual – the critical value of the work was usually held above its commercial value in society. It's difficult to formulate critique for things which hold more commercial value in society, movies being the sole exception. That's because there was a history there. I do believe that there should be critique, however, and so that is why I try to form allies, so I can be useful.

R: Even if it takes another 20 years?

F: That can't be helped. It takes time for creators to get good. And you can say that if there were as many creators now as there were back during the high economic growth period then there would be more results, but that's beside the point. I believe that the creators of that time did what they needed to do. So I think we need to think of things in the long-term.

R: But here we have a magazine from 1980 and the editorial is actually putting out some critical writing...

H: Yeah, the writers of the time like Shinsuke Tajima and Kensho Ikeda were actually writing under the label of "critics."

R: So this is just my impression, but it seems like it has actually become more difficult to do today. And it seems to me that it is mostly down to the demands and authority of the "maker" companies, such as Hirota was describing.

H: The first article I did was for the *Gundam* 20th anniversary LD box, and it was a promotional article. But it didn't look like a promotional thing because it was a *Gundam* glossary of terminology. But because it was a promotion, my name was not on it; rather, it had production accredited to Bandai Visual and the editorial. That's how I started off, and I've been fighting my way through ever since. I'm not trying to write negative things, but it makes me wonder why they don't see it my way. I want the "maker" companies to see what is so wonderful about these shows. One extreme example is when I was writing the pamphlet for Aniplex's *Kara no Kyoukai*, I started having other people coming up to me and saying, "hey, you're the expert on *Kara no Kyoukai*, so write something for us." So I wrote my opinions, and later I noticed that the people in charge of promotion had re-written most of my article. So I asked them to remove my name from it, since it was no longer my article, and asked if they would put the promotion chief's name instead. Aniplex got pissed at that, and the situation escalated to the point where the management of both Animage and Aniplex started having discussions about this. I think if I had reacted by saying, "oh, they re-wrote my piece... Oh well, never mind," and just laughed it off, then it would not have been an issue, but I cannot do that. I don't care if my name is not on it as long as what I write gets through to the reader. On the other hand, I don't want my name associated with other people's words.

R: Has the situation become stricter since the introduction of the production committee system?

F: No, I don't think so. The shift to selling the "video package" itself as the main aim and the introduction of the production committees were both around the same period. It wasn't the committees themselves, rather that the concept that "no video sale: no food to eat" became the norm, so the industry wants to minimize the obstacles to that end.

H: There are people who only care about sales: if the product doesn't sell, then they don't see any point. And you can see it for free on TV! The tradition of seeing anime on TV is long. So you have to understand that the TV airing is nothing but an ad for the video. If you don't understand that, then to the companies you just look like a freeloader who complains about the show but does not pay any money. But the problem is that those "freeloaders" are the ones who are holding online discussions and forming the basis of critique.

F: Some post negative rumors on purpose, and so the companies are quite anxious about that. There are "summary sites" where gathered postings can be seen, and the "maker" companies turn a blind eye, but they really are worried about that. And there are stories that some of these companies are posting their own positive comments about their own product, but you could say that about any publishing firm, and I don't think it's a major priority for them. That's business.

R: You mean so-called "stealth marketing"?

H: Well, I wonder if they actually have any time for that! They're incredibly busy. They're better off just writing that stuff on their official Twitter accounts.

F: Well, you know, what might be going on – if anything – is that the people running the "summary sites" are perhaps told behind-the-scenes, maybe not by anime companies, but by game companies, not to write any bad things about their product, rather than straight out "please write good things!" But who knows.

H: But you know even when we go out drinking, they never mention any of that.



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F: Well, I can't say, I hardly ever go out drinking with people from the companies because I tend to keep a distance.

H: In any case, the production side is too busy to be doing stuff like that.

F: Yeah, if anyone is doing that it'd be the "maker" side.

H: The production companies don't really care if sales are good or not! (laughs)

R: They do it for the love of the craft?

F: Well, it depends on if they're investing in it or not. Anyway, the standard is that they try to produce the show within the budget and then try to reap any profits from out of that. Then again, we're talking about minimizing damages and losses. So I prefer to look at it all from a historical point of view. If you think about it, if you want to talk in terms of journalism – what is journalism, in this case? When reporting about entertainment, true journalism is almost impossible. Mostly because it's just not needed. That, and the fact-checking is extremely difficult. As a business article, perhaps it is doable, because you are talking about economics and such, but when discussing a show's merits and whatnot, you cannot accurately judge the facts. So going in and investigating the making of a show is extremely difficult to do objectively, and so you can't call that journalism. You have almost nothing to gain if you try to do real journalism in that way. It is completely different from reporting on politics, economics, crime, etc. I know from experience because I used to be a newspaper reporter! For example, when interviewing politicians, you would try to press hard for certain answers or make them say certain things almost forcefully to get the real truth, but is it OK to do that with creators? If you press politicians for the truth enough eventually you may cross a line, but even then the price to pay is worth the revelation of the truth, while pressing to get the "truth" from the mouth of a director won't really benefit anybody. It doesn't benefit art. I think it's good that there are people passionate enough that they want to go in and find out more information, but it's difficult to make rules about the conduct. I personally feel that in terms of entertainment there is no journalism, and so I dislike stupid things like celebrity news being called "journalism." There's no investigation there, it's all a preordained ecosystem of mutual coexistence.

R: Maybe the word "journalism" doesn't really apply, then.

H: Yes, I think objective data about the anime business is useful, but I wonder whether that has anything to do with how interesting anime can be.

F: That's another issue altogether – it's for the purposes of defining into some shape the phenomenon of anime. Hirota, you want to make anime more interesting for people, right?

H: Yes.

F: For me, I have to split my aims into two approaches. On the one hand, I write about entertaining things in my own columns, but for data research, I have to ground it within the framework of business or there is no point. I mean, the situation with the "makers" is not perfect, but I just ignore the ridiculous points and try to go and get good results [laughs].

H: [Laughs] In my case, I'm struggling every day.

F: Well, that's like you...

H: I'm supposed to be the official writer for *Rinne no Lagrange*, but I bring up issues to the committee almost every day.

R: Anything happen recently?

H: This is almost off-the-record, but there's a magazine by Square Enix called *Young Gan-Gan*, right? Square Enix is the sponsor of the [*Lagrange*] show, and so whatever they say goes. Every month they give me one or two color pages to fill. And when I send them the articles usually they check it and send it back to me, and then I check it and fix things and give it back to them, all usually within 30 minutes. This is normal in the magazine business: the faster, the better. Anyway, last night was the deadline, but I still hadn't gotten back the page from the production committee. So of course, Square Enix got upset. I was told that there was no proofread, and so if I wanted to make any changes they would accept them, but this would be it. It was an important article and so I thought that there would be things which may need fixing, so I had waited, but it never came. Well, I looked for any errors and I made a few changes myself. There are at least four people that my emails go around to, so I thought that somebody would have checked it.

F: Sometimes they go through the director so it takes time.

H: In the show, there are short flashbacks pointing to a deep backstory, but it is not clear just by watching it on TV, so I try to piece this all together so the readers can understand. So I need to go to the animation materials to get the data, but the production company would tell me that sometimes it conflicts, like a certain character is 13 years old in the storyboards, but 14 in other materials.

F: Yeah, sometimes they change the settings midway through.

H: So I have to choose carefully. Well, that's the type of secret suffering that I go through... The information is not all revealed in the show, it is hidden away somewhere. So I try to negotiate with them to show this stuff, and sometimes they agree. In that sense, I wish writers and creators of the show would aim towards the same goal. I don't want the viewers to misunderstand and get left behind by the show.

R: Digressing slightly, now that we are talking about *Lagrange*, what I thought was most intriguing was the aspect of revitalization of local communities.

H: That is also a point which is being misunderstood.

R: Is it?

H: Yes. Actually, it's being featured on tonight's *Close-Up Gendai* on NHK [a daily current affairs show]. So most likely they're going to show the relation between Kamogawa [a seaside town in Chiba prefecture where the show takes place] and *Lagrange*. Now, as far as I can remember, the Kamogawa tourist promotion office only became interested in pursuing this around October last year.

R: So, quite late in the game.

H: Yes, it was late. There were no plans to do anything together with Kamogawa during the scriptwriting phase.

R: We went to the production announcement event over at Nissan Hall in October, where they distributed pamphlets promoting Kamogawa as a tourist spot, but there were no tangible links, so in a blog article that is basically what I concluded – that there was a full collaboration with Nissan, but not with Kamogawa.

H: Right, because it was only after the event that they actually got more actively involved.



R: What was the reason?

H: I don't know, but they started doing a lot of things of their own accord, like starting their own "*Lagrange* Pilgrimage Tour" or something, and it took me by surprise.

R: I got in touch with the organizers over there and they told me that from April they will start the [local] activities proper.

H: Oh, really?

R: I'm not sure exactly what yet, but it seems they are planning lots of things, like now they're accepting applications for membership in a real-life Jersey Club [which, in the show, helps out the local community in a variety of ways] and such.

H: Right now we're in the middle of negotiating the specific promotional strategies for the second season, trying to work out the slogans and things, and half of the time in the meetings has been spent on Kamogawa. So in the end, we couldn't even get to the slogans. So the whole thing about the Nissan collaboration, like how the designs ended up being used in the show, etc, most of that fell by the wayside.

R: But Nissan only handled the mecha designs and that's it, right?

H: Well, they also did weapons. Like *Gundam*, at first they just use machine guns and stuff, but towards the end they have weapons that perfectly complement those designs. So there is a lot to promote there. I asked why we weren't saying much about that, and it seems the article about that will appear after the show is done. As for Kamogawa, it could have been anywhere, as long as there was a seaside. The director didn't think of any place specifically as long as it was relevant insofar as it was important for the protagonist to protect.

R: So why Kamogawa?

H: The production staff most likely chose it, but it was Kamogawa themselves that took the opportunity to promote the pilgrimage thing.

F: I think that from a creative point of view, using a real-life location rather than a blank void is much more conducive to creativity. So it makes sense to use Kamogawa in location hunting, or "image hunting." It didn't have to be Kamogawa, it could have been Takagawa.

H: Yeah. And it's supposed to be the Kamogawa of the future, anyway! [Laughs] They hardly mention it, but it's supposed to be 2032 or so.

R: I see. OK, well, sorry to have dragged this off on a tangent... To get back on topic, I think because the readers of this article are mostly non-Japanese, I would like to clearly define who these "maker" companies are and what their status within the production committee system is.

F: Well, the "maker" companies are so-called because they are the companies that actually make the video packages and market anime as a product, and they form the central entities within the production committees. I think that's the easiest way to put it.

R: OK. In order to clarify the significance of that further, let us compare this situation surrounding the production committee system with that of the time preceding the introduction of this system. For example, with *Macross* you have Big West acting

as the main licensor...

F: Maybe we should leave Big West out of this since it would just get overly complicated... [laughs]. Basically, a toy company would provide funds, a TV station would come in and ask for a show, and the production company would provide an animated show.

R: A good example would be *Gundam*.

F: Yes. In that case, an advertising agency called Soutsu came in and the sponsor, a toy company called Clover, provided most of the funds, which went through the ad agency and the TV station and towards Sunrise's production. At the time there was no such thing as a home video market, but if they wanted to develop such video products, [the company releasing it] would negotiate with the agency and Sunrise for the rights and sort out the relevant payments, and then release the product. However, toy company sponsors gradually began to diminish. Around this time, in order to reinvent the anime business, the video makers became more prominent and eventually joined together with the production companies to make the anime.

R: To put it as simply as possible, the situation completely reversed. The people who were sort of "at the bottom" in the production process, the video makers, became the "top," the leading authorities in the anime business, while the role of the toy manufacturers transformed into companies simply providing spin-off merchandise.

F: Right. The moment the sponsors started shying away from this system was when it all changed.

H: There was also the OVA movement...

F: Yeah, that had already begun.

H: Before the OVA there was no reason for the "makers" to be at the top.

R: Yes, but that was a necessity due to the fact that OVAs were not shown on TV, and were designed to be "products" from the start. These days, TV is once again the main source of anime, but still the "maker" companies are at the center. How do you explain that situation?

F: We cannot be completely certain, but if you look at the history of the OVA, towards the latter half you can see that very many of the shows are done in a TV-style format. They're 30 minutes long, they have "eye-catches" in the middle...

R: Yeah, that's kind of weird.

F: *Patlabor* [the original OVA series] and *Gunbuster* were some of the first ones to do that, and later *Tenchi Muyo!* employed all that to great success. So they most likely thought, "This kind of thing might be a hit if it went on TV as-is." *Irresponsible Captain Tyler* is a good example of this – it was based on a light novel, and it was put on local TV, because they didn't have the funds to air it on the key networks. So it was a trial run, but it became a hit. Eventually you got big hits like *Evangelion*, and that paved the way for more anime in that style.

H: *Patlabor* did have commercials for Exia, though.

F: Exia..? Oh, yeah, you mean Axia!

H: Yeah, that's it, Axia.

R: Oh yeah, the cassette tape, right?

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F: Yes.

R: Anyway, there's still a mystery... Why go back to TV?

F: OVAs are available at rental, and the risks leading up to the actual viewing are high. They don't sell on their own.

H: Some had theatrical premieres, too.

F: Yeah, they had limited theatrical releases, like *Megazone 23*. But in any case, OVAs don't really have much power to reach audiences. Even if they're on a rental shop shelf, unless people had a rental shop 500m from their homes, they wouldn't bother going. People don't change their daily course just to go to a rental shop, rather, it's somewhere you drop by on your way home from the station.

H: Also, during the 80s there used to be around 20,000 rental shops, about the same as Pachinko parlors at the time.

F: Yeah, they used to be small independent places but now they've become part of chains.

H: [Laughs] They used to have them on the second floor of ramen shops, but they're gone now.

F: Yeah, it's too tough for independents to survive these days. There's a very famous one full of rare stuff in Oo-Izumi-Gakuen which is closing down. So TV is very good at spreading those shows around, and so get people interested in them.

R: But wouldn't they get picked up by magazines otherwise? What's the role of magazines, then?

F: Compared to television, they can't reach anywhere near such a wide audience.

R: But they both target the anime fans, don't they?

F: The role of magazines as a medium is rather to complement the TV anime broadcast. People tend to buy the magazine if the anime they are currently watching is being featured in it – not the other way around. There are no people who are interested in anime in general and want to know more about it as a genre, and so buy an anime magazine.

H: But it did used to be like that.

F: Yeah, it was. The writers used to know the industry inside out, and there were fewer shows anyway...

H: Yeah, they knew everything.

F: But still, even from the early days, fans bought magazines because they liked certain anime. That's why they would sell more if they put the popular shows on the cover, and sales would plummet if they featured a less popular show. You can see that clear as day in the sales data. *Newtype* used to sell a lot more, but these days sells around 100,000 to 200,000 copies each. You can check the figures online at the ABC [Japan Audit Bureau of Circulations] site. Animage only manages a few tens of thousands. Even if they sold much more in the past, think of it like the current internet situation – it was just a gathering of the noisy minority, and thus not really enough to influence the ratings in any significant way.

R: So in the end, magazines are just to advertise the shows?

F: Well, whether they effectively advertise shows or not, they help the viewers to further enjoy the shows.

R: So there's no chance of critique?

F: It's more about trying to fill the week-long gap in between each 30-minute episode, for the junior high school age crowd.

R: Even today?

F: Yes, it's true even today. There is other information in there, but that's the main function of the magazines.

R: So, how long do you think that situation will last, considering the increasing possibility that television broadcasts are no longer going to be the main source of anime viewing for a lot of people? Many are streaming, or watching the shows on DVD. In other words, it's almost a return to the OVA effect.

F: Well, even if streaming becomes the norm, the precedent of a weekly broadcast will not be compromised – it's something that goes back 50 years all the way to *Tetsuwan Atom*. That format is not going away. And in any case, net streaming is actually rather difficult – high school kids are only now starting to get their own computers, and they are still relatively few. And the vast majority of junior high kids still do not own computers. So in terms of magazines, they are not for people in their 30s, they are for those in that age group, who do not have access to digital media yet. Put it this way – it is wrong to classify anime magazines together with typical movie magazines. It is more correct to see them as the equivalents of the old idol magazines. Anime has long been regarded as low-brow – there was a time when it was considered educational, but after a while that image changed. Now the idol magazine characteristics are all that is left. So until junior high school kids have their own access to information, I don't see the role of anime magazines changing much. Even thinking about it regionally, we are still in the situation now that kids in Tohoku, for example, whose parents have no interest in the internet or cable television, pick up the magazines and are in awe of all the information just within Tokyo!

R: I see. Hirota, what do you think?

H: About anime magazines? Well, I wrote for *Animage Original* for a while... And for *Newtype* I did *Aquarion* tie-up promotional pieces "disguised" as articles. It did feel like advertising. I did a few *Eden of the East* articles, too, in which I had the opportunity to do a round-table discussion with [character designer] Chika Umino and director [Kenji] Kamiyama. I had thought that it was going to be meaningful [in terms of information], but towards the end it became a fun and enjoyable talk – in reality, it wasn't meant to be just that. They ended it on a high note, but looking back, is there any worthwhile data we gained? It just felt like a chat. I had opportunities to talk to voice actors, too, and they were even chattier. They were like "oh, he is such a nice person..." etc. And there's always somebody from the "maker" companies with us when we do these. So it always ends up being "promotional." It's because of that that I've been sort of turned off the major magazines, and been concentrating on publications like *Otona Anime*, which, though they have their issues, attempt to gain insight on the production behind the scenes. Having said that, they do feature specially commissioned cover art to boost sales. People these days prioritize the pictures themselves. It's like with gravure magazines. Fujitsu, you mentioned idol magazines, but it's really gravure, right?

F: Yeah.

H: It goes back to *Newtype*. *Newtype* were the ones who chose the gravure magazine format.

F: Yeah, that was their intention from the very beginning.



H: If you look at the first cover, you can tell. Liliith Fuau, right? The idol/mascot character from *L-Gaim*. They put her on the cover in a cel-art style picture.

F: That was the cover for issue 0, though. Issue 1 was *Gundam*.

H: So from that point on, it was no longer “reading material,” rather, “viewing material.”

F: At the time in the mid- to late-80s, visual magazines were rare, so it was becoming a trend to use that to compete with *Animage*.

H: And it sold well, so the rest of them followed suit.

F: Also, the number of anime shows that magazines featured decreased around the mid-80s. Before then, the editors and the fans were very similar types of people, there was a solidarity there. If you notice, at around the mid-80s people like us stopped watching TV anime because it stopped having maniac-oriented content and we went after the OVAs instead, which meant that the magazines had to find a way to survive, and they did that by featuring the shows and characters that the fans liked – which means that there was no longer a real solidarity there anymore. So the culture that had been brewing where a writer would passionately write about anime works simply halted right there. I used to call this period the “anime winter,” but I got a bad rep for that, so recently I’m calling it the “Anime reshuffle period” [laughs]. In any case, this point in time was very significant for the anime magazines.

H: Yeah. It seems like 1985 was the year where everything changed – It was the year of *Zeta Gundam*, and *Newtype* began then, too... It became a different medium.

F: *Animage* had a hard time picking up material for about 6 or 7 years after that... They even did a special feature on the most tear-jerking moments in classic Toei Animation...

H: What!? (laughs)

F: ...They even did a “Nostalgic Masterpieces” feature and put *Ace wo Nerae* on the cover!

H & R: Wow...!

F: Although that may have been to coincide with Part 2 coming out. But in any case, they were struggling to find content. And it didn’t help that they changed editors during the late 80s/early 90s, either.

H: And the same goes for modeling magazines. After *Zeta Gundam*, every magazine had to have the latest robot kit built and painted on the cover, as soon as possible. Up until that point, the age of the kit didn’t matter. Even those that were out of production used to be picked up, customized to look realistic, and showcased in the magazine – so it was the quality of the builds that sold the magazines. However, after ’85, *Hobby Japan* started pushing the new anime characters... It became all about being the first ones to put the new designs on the cover, even if they weren’t yet released in kit form. So it’s a similar situation.

R: I see.

H: [In both cases] the characters became the main focus, while the shows themselves were more like a “bonus.” “I don’t like the show, but I like the characters...”. That kind of thinking was not around before that time.

F: Yeah... [pause]... Like *Bryger*. [laughs]

H: Oh, yeah, *Bryger*...[laughs]

F: *Bryger*... it was like, “the characters are cool, but the show is lame.” [laughs]

H: Yeah. You would watch the opening and then turn it off. [All laugh]

F: Yeah, yeah... Going off on a tangent a bit, but you know *Captain Future*...?

R&H: [Laugh; splutter tea]

F: ...They announced there was gonna be a Blu-Ray Box – it got cancelled, in the end – and I was thinking about getting it... So I watched a bit of an illegal upload, and after seeing those images, I realized, “No way, I mustn’t spend money on this...!” [laughs]

H: What about the *Lensman* TV series? I watched the opening and thought that was incredible...

R: Ah, Kouji Morimoto.

H: ...But I don’t remember anything about the series itself!

F: A lot of people say that the series is better than the movie, though.

H: I’m hooked on *Yamato 2* recently. I think it’s much better than *Saraba*. The series structure, I mean.

F: That was [Keisuke] Fujikawa, yeah?

H: Yes...

[What follows is a heated discussion about wave-motion cannons, tachyon particles, plasma gas, Saturn’s Cassini quadrant and all things *Starblazer-y* and nice. Unfortunately, it is all way off-topic and shall be saved for another day...]

F: [Wrapping up the *Yamato* love...] ...Well, this is basically the kind of thing we did [in the *Great Mechanics DX* regular column] for three years. [laughs]

H: It’s passionate!

F: Yes, it is. ... Anyway, what we can conclude is that in the mid-80s, there was a major split in the world of Japanese animation, and the medium itself was affected heavily by this. The type of anime which was cheap to view and would excite junior high and high school kids dropped off TV and shifted to the OVA. There were hit OVAs, but in the end, the format relied on people who had already seen it – which meant that it didn’t spread.

H: They did have magazines focused on OVAs, though, like *Anime V*. It didn’t last long, though.

F: Well, it lasted quite a bit...

H: About three years.

F: No, no, it was more than that. It went into the 90s.

R: Yeah, around ’96 or so. Then *Anime V* became *Looker* magazine.

F: Yes. Actually, I made my writing debut in *Looker*.

R: Oh, really?



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Anime UK, #9 (August/September, 1993)



F: Yeah, just when it changed.

H: Really? It went on that long? Wow...

R: I think publication numbers decreased, because those latter issues are really hard to find these days.

F: Yes, I'm sure that they did significantly reduce the numbers.

H: I think theatrical screenings help the OVA situation a lot. The original *Megazone 23* had one, complete with pamphlet and everything... And these days that's what they're doing with Yamato...

R: Yeah, and with *Gundam Unicorn*...

F: Yes, but it's just Bandai Visual who are doing all that. These really short showings... They're doing them for the fans, as a trial.

R: I suppose it's not that different from a screening of a minor movie.

F: Hmm... Well, it's about effective advertising. For example, you could either organize screenings in ten theatres around the country, or you could do the main cities: Tokyo, Osaka, Nagoya – then if it's successful, move on to Kyushu and Hokkaido. The question is, which method will better promote the product and raise awareness.

H: Then you have *Momo e no Tegami*, where Kadokawa is putting it out on 300 theatres across the country. What are they going to do afterwards? They only have one character.

R: What exactly do you mean by, "What are they going to do?"

H: Basically, it's unclear how they are planning to recoup their costs.

R: Not home video?

H: Before that. It's not like a live-action movie where you can rely on star power. It's all about the pictures. So the star power would come in the shape of a popular manga artist or illustrator, like Madhouse's Chinese collaboration, *Donjiki no Doojee* [Tibetan Dog], where Naoki Urasawa did the character designs.

F: Hmm. But Urasawa's characters don't exactly lend themselves well to character product development...

R: But *Momo e no Tegami* is not really being marketed towards anime fans, rather families, etc...

H: Yes. But you don't get a sense of the appeal of the characters from a still image, until they start moving.

F: Well, they are advertising it on the Train Channel [on the monitors in most central JR train lines in Tokyo].

R: Exactly, that's how people can see the moving images.

F: When I hear that they're planning on 300 theatres, I think: wow, they're really putting a lot of effort into this... But then, 300 is sort of... Unprecedented. I mean, these days, if you put the words "Studio Ghibli" on a marquee, you can get people to see it, and 100 or 200 theatres is no problem. *Momo e no Tegami* has nothing like that, and they're going for 300. I'm a little worried that it's too many... Wouldn't 120 or so be better? [laughs] In any case, I am writing articles for it in the hope that it's a hit. Those that have already seen it really like it. It's a nice,

touching story, so I hope that comes through.

R: Yes, thanks to Hirota I attended a press screening and it was good. I actually bumped into Mr. Kosei Ono there. Do you know him?

F&H: Ah, yes.

R: Yeah, I had worked with him in Kyoto a few times so it was nice to catch up.

F: I see. Anyway, I need to get going...

R: Right, yes, it's time. Before you go, I wanted just to show you these... [Pulls out old issues of *Anime UK/FX*...] This discussion is meant to be in the style of these magazines.

F: Oh yeah. In the US I picked up several anime magazines to check them out. Wow, look, *Sol Bianca*.

R: Yeah, they're mostly from the mid-90s. I think for the most part, they didn't need any permission or special proofreading from the [Japanese] "maker" companies or copyright holders for the featured content. And I think their information is accurate. Also, back then, old and new anime shows were being released together at the same time, so the content of these magazines was always quite refreshing.

F: It's funny... When these shows get exported overseas, the context and chronology tends to get lost.

R: Yes. But by looking at these from a Japanese perspective, that loss sort of helps you to reflect on the Japanese side of the situation and garner a new understanding. That is what I find interesting. Anyway, thank you both again for coming today.





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# *THE CHRYSANTHEMUM AND THE VHS TAPE.*

Words and Photos by DAVID MERRILL

Pour enough liquor down any associate professor of history at any 2 or 4 year higher-learning institution you care to mention and they'll let you in on the dirty little secret of chronological knowledge - nothing ever really has a "beginning". Nations, peoples, political movements, pop music careers - they all emerged from existing structures and will in turn prosper, divide, and mutate on into the future. The same is true of the "anime fandom" currently infesting hotel ballrooms, Internet message boards, public parks, and, uh, fanzines across our great land. This cartoon-fan culture came bearing the nerd DNA of dozens of different strains of fanboy and geek girl, as recombined in the rich, fecund womb of American Nerd World '77, when the goals of the consumer electronics industry, UHF television program directors and Japanese toy corporations all aligned in the skies in a cosmic event no Mayan ever predicted.

And why would they? Why would any pop-culture trend prognosticator look at, say, poorly subtitled Raideen or weirdly dubbed *Speed Racer* or black and white reruns of *The Amazing Three* and think "Gee, I bet in 25 years people will be throwing money at these Japanese cartoons like they was something special!" Did this cross anyone's mind back when the San Diego Comic-Con filled one mid-sized hotel ballroom, back when Comiket was nothing but tables of *Space Battleship Yamato* doujinshi? No sir.

And yet here we are, swollen, distended, a bloated testament to the obsessive-compulsive impulses deep in everybody's hearts. Even in our post-anime boom economy, there's still a wide variety of Japanese cartoon merchandise fighting for your recession-wary dollar. You can still waste plenty of time on the finicky details of what color underwear you prefer for your favorite high school (sorry, JUNIOR COLLEGE) anime heroine, and god help anyone who disagrees with you on the Internets!

Things were different for anime fans of the 70s and 80s. For one thing, weed was cheaper. Also, there wasn't any such thing as "anime fandom." Hell, they didn't even call it "anime". You had to learn about Japanimation on street corners via that gang at school who watched *Star Blazers* or *Battle Of The Planets*, or maybe your local East or West Coast UHF station was showing badly subtitled episodes of *Cyborg 009* or *UFO Diapollon* or *Gattaiager The Combo-Car*. Perhaps you grew up watching *Astro Boy* and *Kimba The White Lion* on NBC and never quite got over it.

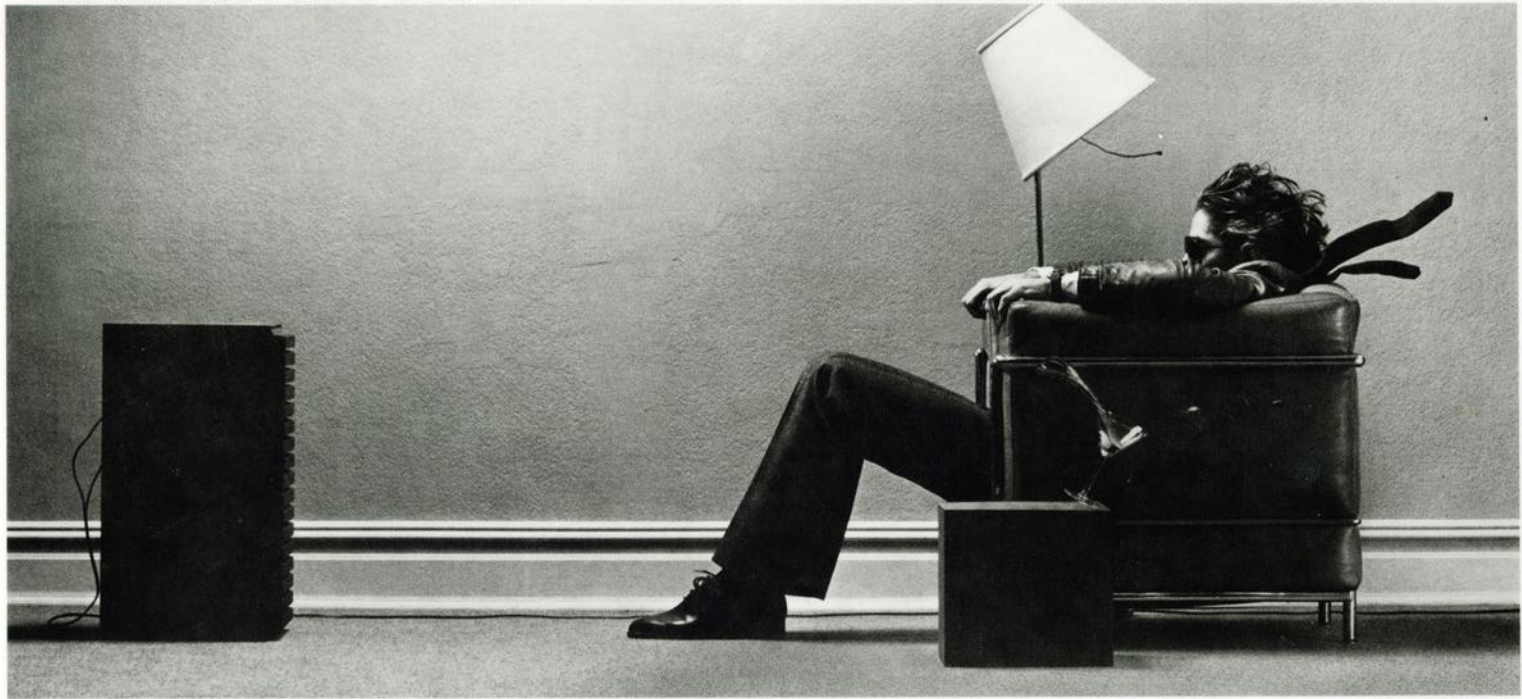
Deep in your heart you knew that the Japanese animation art form was as valid a technique of artistic expression as any outer space movie, superhero comic, or barbarian pulp fiction. You wanted a Japanimation Fandom of your very own, just like the *Man From Uncle* fans had a club, just like the *Logan's Run* people had a club, just every other media SF or fantasy property had its fandom. You wanted an anime fandom and it didn't exist. Solution: go make it.

As most self-identified anime fans of the 70s era were already members of established fandoms (not me, I was in elementary school), it was only natural to use them as a blueprint for action. The big difference between proselytizing anime fans and the would-be missionaries of earlier fandoms is that anime fans could (and believe me, did) literally force people to sit down and experience Japanese cartoons. Trekkies circa 1970 could only ask people to tune in to NBC on Thursdays, SF fans could only recommend you check out *Ringworld* from your local public library, *Star Wars* fans merely stood in line over and over again wearing their Darth Vader T-shirts proudly – but you could bring a VHS tape of *Project A-Ko* or *Megazone 23* to any public gathering, throw it into whatever VCR was handy, and soon you had a room full of people, already trained from birth to watch whatever was on the TV, engrossed in the love triangle between Hikaru, Misa, and Minmay. Even as early as 1977, even before anime clubs had names, anime fans were screening rental prints of Tezuka's *Alakazam The Great* and videotapes of *Astro Boy* episodes at the meeting hall of the Los Angeles Science Fiction Society.





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By the middle of the 1980s home video equipment had gotten cheap enough that any high school student with a part time job like me could afford a decent VCR and blanks enough to swap anime with strangers. And if you had gas enough to drive all over town, you could be the Johnny Anime-seed of your local community, bringing Japanese cartoons to computer users' group meetings, *Star Trek* club meetings, comic shops, anywhere like-minded nerds met gathered and could be impressed by cartoons in which *Captain Harlock* shot aliens in the face.

To illustrate, from my own experience; it wasn't just vintage Pertwee-era action that got me out of the house on an otherwise boring Sunday to the *Dr. Who* club that met at Emory University. Turns out one of the organizers, Atlanta superfan Bill Ritch, had anime VHS, stuff like *Final Yamato* and the English dub of *Phoenix 2772*. An early adopter of consumer home video, Bill's first Beta deck ran him a cool \$1000 back in 1980. By '86 he was the AV go-to guy for Atlanta's cons, running video rooms and film rooms (16 and 35mm) at most local shows including Atlanta's Worldcon (which, by the way, was AWESOME). His contacts, both local and through a video-trading APA, gave him access to a worldwide variety of TV shows and films, and his involvement with the *Dr. Who* club gave fans such as myself a contact point for both anime VHS and fellow fans.

In a few months, Atlanta's anime nerds got their act together and started their own anime club as a chapter of the national C/FO, itself spawned from those 70's screenings at the LASFS. Our story wasn't unique; across America the anime fan army was mobilizing. Local anime clubs could meet wherever a TV and VCR would fit: apartment party rooms, libraries, community centers, church basements, university lecture halls, "community rooms" in banks, noisy pizza parlors, my parents' den. I don't recommend that last one.

In practical terms running the anime club meant loading your car with a giant box of club library tapes, the club's TV, a VCR or two, whatever sound system you might bring, and various power strips and RCA cables, zines, flyers, and other ephemera. You'd drive out to the meeting location, picking up a few members along the way. Make sure you get there at least an hour before meeting time so you can check in at the desk, open the room up, get the chairs set up, and set up the TV, the VCR and the stereo. Once the meeting began you might have a discussion about what was going to be shown. Many clubs had rigid schedules of TV series that were watched sequentially, which meant a show like *Zeta Gundam* might run for five or six years longer than Nippon Sunrise or God intended. About halfway through the meeting you'd break for the business portion of the meeting, where you'd discuss upcoming conventions, club news, etc. Then you might throw in a movie, put somebody in charge, and go for lunch, because by this time you're hungry.



Of course the room is full of anime fans – high school and college-age men with varying standards of personal hygiene and dress, slouched on folding chairs, watching some indecipherable, terrible-looking cartoon on a tiny TV. It shouldn't be surprising to learn that we had trouble keeping the libraries happy. The librarians would poke their head into the room, recoil at the stench, and start questioning their community room usage policies. Sometimes prospective members would take one look at the silent crowd of hunched-over, black-clad, acne-scarred deviants, and turn right around and leave.

As a proselytizing tool, the anime club wasn't very useful – it was strictly for the true believers. If you wanted to spread the word among the uninitiated, that's where the convention came in. The mid-1980s were a far cry from the Comicons of today that boast 130,000 attendees – the largest 80s conventions did eight or nine thousand, which would barely get you into the top ten anime shows these days. However, being the only place in town where like-minded nerds gathered, the 80s fan convention couldn't be ignored. Some shows grudgingly allowed Japanimation into their schedule – every town had a local 'expert' willing to spend a weekend showing their collection to the rubes – and others saw the benefits almost immediately. Larry Lankford in Dallas ran a small empire of "Fantasy Fair" events throughout Texas, and the Dallas-based Earth Defense Command anime group was commissioned to run his anime rooms from the start, in spite of an early, regretful incident involving a low-ball estimate of *Be Forever Yamato's* seemingly endless running time. Equipment would vary from show to show; some conventions would rely on standard tube televisions, others would rent the big rear-projection TVs, and occasionally you'd have to deal with the dreaded three-lens CRT projector, which required constant adjustment and mysterious "BNC" connectors.

Jeff Blend, key figure of the Texas anime club EDC, reports that a particular Lone Star favorite was *Project A-Ko*, which through repeated screenings built an audience-participatory following that rivaled that of the *Rocky Horror Picture Show*. Bill Ritch recalls Atlanta's SF convention organizers were "happy to have anime" – it helps that most of the titles were SF – and that Harmony Gold was generous in supplying *Robotech* screeners. You'd find similar videos being shown in anime rooms across the country, common denominators being action, girls, and a passing resemblance to comprehensibility. Titles like *Lupin III*, *Vampire Hunter D*, *Bubblegum Crisis*, *Riding Bean*, and *Black Magic M-66* could be enjoyed without knowing a lick of Japanese. Other more complex plotlines might be explained by a self-appointed narrator, helping the crowd through impenetrable sequences. The fansubbing movement was just gaining steam; early experiments like the *Macross* movie fansub that replaced character names with their *Robotech* equivalents were eschewed in favor of a more faithful approach to the source material. Parody dubs like Pinesalad's *Dirty Pair* and Corn Pone Flicks' *Yamato* spoof "Star Dipwads" could be counted upon to draw standing-room only crowds. My experience running anime rooms at SF cons revealed some interesting truths – crowds of gamers, Trekkies or Whovians would happily fill rooms to watch un-translated *Dirty Pair* or Miyazaki films while the convention organizers nursed resentment at this new art form and would frequently use any pretext to interrupt the anime screenings. Once you see a con chair manhandle your television out of the room in the middle of *My Neighbor Totoro*, you start thinking it's time to pack up and go home. And we did.



Behind it all was the home video revolution of the 80s. Consumer electronics had dropped in price, the “Betamax Case” of Sony vs Universal had established the legality of home taping, and even a part time job provided enough disposable income to supply the necessary materials. After the technically superior Beta lost the ‘format war’ to VHS, your only question was which brand of blank tape to buy. The big names like Sony, TDK, Maxell and Fuji all had their standard and premium grades, the TDK E-HG and Maxell Gold being preferred by those ‘in the know’. Polaroid and Kodak were acceptable, barely. Off-brands or house brands like Laser, Sonic, or Nippon were to be avoided at all costs.

Laserdiscs, as a top-quality alternative to VHS, were part of the environment throughout the 80s. Import LDs from Japan were actually cheaper than VHS for some reason, and gangs of anime fans would pool their cash for LD sets and the cases of VHS tape needed to give everybody a copy. It wasn’t uncommon to see packs of nerdy 19 year olds – I mean, discerning, classy consumers - in the checkout lines of Sam’s Club with cases of VHS tape, 3-liters of soda, and industrial sized bags of cheetos, ready for a weekend-long all-male orgy of daisy-chained VHS decks, overheated power strips, and delivery pizza. Locked in a two-bedroom apartment with poor ventilation and abysmal bathroom facilities, these weekends became endurance contests for the true believers.

It may be hard to conceive of a time when magnetic recording tape was marketed as a lifestyle accessory, but one look at Maxell’s famous “sunglasses” ad will give you a snapshot of the mindset. It’s the 1980s. You’re moving into an expensive, high-end, Nagel-print, sportscar driving-glove world, and your audio and video equipment has to be top-of-the-line because YOU are a discerning, classy consumer, enjoying the latest in high-tech animation. And it was actually true, for a few hours there in the late 1980s.

Anime fans could feel it all coming together, when we knew that somehow, soon, everybody else was going to look at these Japanese cartoons and see them as WE saw them. That we were, for a tiny instant, actually on the cutting edge of global popular culture.

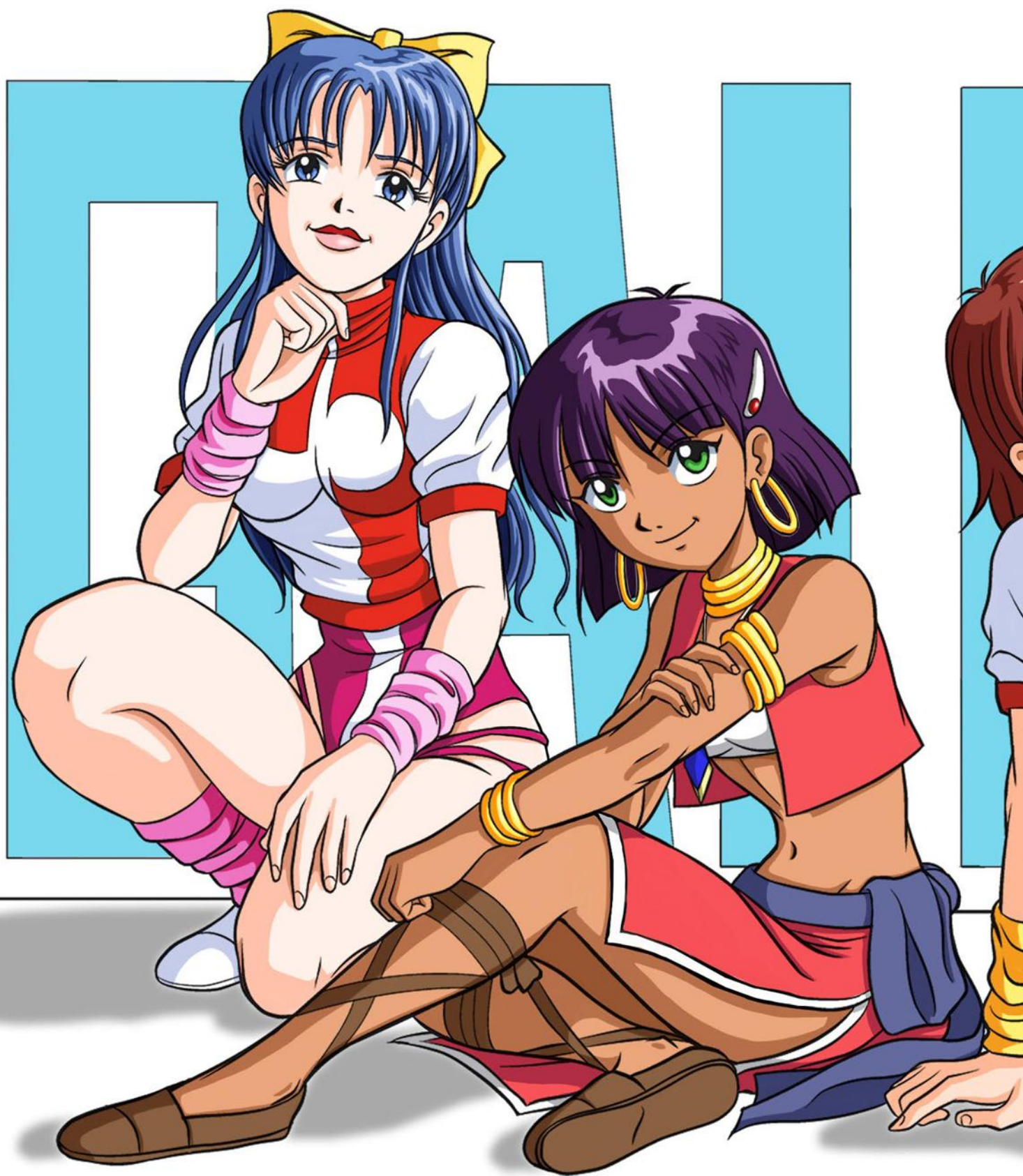
This is the world the nascent American anime industry moved into – a market primed and ready, prepared by an advance guard of unpaid publicity agents. It’s safe to say without the fandom there wouldn’t be an American anime industry. However, the reverse is also true – the American anime industry appearing when it did saved anime fandom from total extinction. By 1989 the fan club organizers and local go-to guys had been doing this for four or five or ten years, a decade of copying tapes for strangers, of answering letters, of writing fanzines and lugging TVs across the country and spending their spare cash on postage and blank tape. Burnout was picking them off one by one, fan politics was driving them underground, real life was interrupting with marriage, careers, and children. Darn it, Japanese cartoons were corporate mass media, broadcast television and movies and rental cassettes, meant to be distributed en masse. Not by volunteers daisy-chaining VHS decks together in their living rooms.

Thankfully the same video revolution that midwived anime fandom also gave entrepreneurs the means to market Japanese animation directly to consumers, filling the shelves of big-box retailers and Suncoasts and Blockbusters, swelling the warehouses of Columbia House and The Right Stuf. The cable TV networks battled for dominance with their own specialty anime blocks, soon the DVD market exploded with box sets and collector’s packaging, and the tape-gods of old could finally lay their burden down and simply enjoy watching the damn things. Which, truth be told, is all they ever wanted in the first place.

Anime fandom is a hobby. It’s supposed to be fun. For a while there it was more work than fun, but even that’s our own stupid fault. There’s no need to stretch this into a fable about the brave pioneers who sat their brave pioneer asses into their hand-carved La-Z-Boy chairs and watched that fansub of the *Macross* movie on a TV whittled out of whalebone and stretched animal hides while wolves and wild heathen redskins howled outside. The uncomfortable truth is, we’re just talking about watching cartoons and liking them a little more than is good for you. Working a little too hard to find the things and to find other people that liked the things so you didn’t feel so forever alone. The good things that came out of that era – the friendships, the awareness of worlds of culture beyond the local mall, the ability to deal with really annoying people - are still with us, and, unlike our dusty old VCRs, we use them every day.



*SPECIAL THANKS TO: Jeff Blend, Meg Evans, Steve Harrison, Bill Ritch, and Devlin Thompson.*







McKenzie 2012



# ANIME CON CONFIDENTIAL.

Words by PATRICK MACIAS / Photo by TREVOR WILSON

"A lot of what happens at anime cons has nothing to do with Japanese cartoons," says the mysterious figure known only as Director X. "Anime cons are full of shoplifters, people looking to get drunk and have sex. Some people just come to the con to have a wild weekend and cause trouble."

Director X has agreed to talk about the decadence and debauchery that goes on at US anime conventions as long as I don't use his real name or reveal his secret identity. All you need to know is that he has worked as an anime convention director for ten years, helping to organize and maintain order at a large-sized con held every summer in the US.

While other sectors of the J-pop business, such as home video, are in a slump, anime conventions are booming. The largest, LA's Anime Expo, had a record 43,000 visitors in 2008. Thousands pay to attend smaller cons, such as Baltimore's Otakon, where attendance figures continue to rise annually. No matter what time of year it is, there's usually an anime convention held somewhere in the US practically every week.

Now in his forties, Director X has been a fan of anime since he first saw *Speed Racer* as a child on TV in 1960s. Back then, before the widespread popularity of Japanese pop culture, American geeks would throw conventions for literary SF, comic books or *Star Trek*. But eventually, as pockets of anime fans slowly began to grow and organize, they too began to put on small cons of their own. X recalls, "Back at the dawn of anime cons, around 1985 or so, the typical fan was 25-30 years old, and mostly male." For the most part, these early anime conventions were all-day viewing party where a dozen or so fans would sit, eat junk food, and watch whatever anime they had on hand, usually at a library, a college, or someone's house.

But by the late nineties, TV hits like *Sailor Moon* and *Dragon-ball Z*, as well as the home video market for anime, created a new wave of both anime fans, and anime conventions. Says X, "the crowds got younger, and the problem became teenagers getting drunk and starting fights and puking all over the place... because teens can't handle their liquor."



Now, the biggest anime conventions in the US are massive events held at hotels or large convention centers that last for days on end. Director X compares the situation to the one in Japan: "I was reading the other day about Comiket and how people line up all night, go inside, and then when the sun goes down, everyone just goes home." But at a US convention, the party is just beginning.

"Anime cons are a big social event for a lot of people," explains X. "The rest of the time they are working or going to school. Instead of going to the clubs every weekend, they save up and go to a con. So they want things like dances and 24 hour programming, because they are trying to squeeze a year's worth of fun into a few days. People stay up all night and scream and holler."

While many otaku enjoy such conventions quietly by attending panels, meeting guests from Japan, or shopping in the dealer's room, others, says X, "will take over a hotel, buy a lot of booze, and party."

Hotel rooms have become a kind of Ground Zero for con misbehavior. Says Director X, "American otaku are not rock stars. They don't break TVs. But since many of them are teenagers and away from home for the first time, they think 'we can drink all the soda we want, we can eat McDonald's or order pizza five times a day, and mom and dad can't stop us.' They leave trash all over the place. And they don't understand that they have to let in the maid once a day to change the towels."

Even though most hotels have occupancy limits, "15 people will share one hotel room, so they only have to pay 10 dollars each to have a place to stay. I've seen rooms where you can't walk on the floor because there are so many people lying on the ground. It's not a pretty sight. There's empty bottles everywhere, puke all over the place. It's like college, in a way."

It can be a hazardous environment, and some convention program books actually include brief "Con Survival Guides" that include reminders to get enough rest, to drink water, and be mindful of others. Still says X, "Our con gets about five ambulance calls every year. People drink too much, they fall down, or they don't take their medication. Other people get dislocated joints during the dance, or become dehydrated because they don't drink anything but soda for three days."

When medical crews aren't hauling away convention goers, the police are. Director X, who has long battled shoplifters at the con he works for, claims, "CDs and DVD box sets are the most popular things to steal at cons since vendors tend to put them on the edge of the table and people can just sweep them into their bags. When we catch them, we take them to the security office. One time, I remember there was this one guy who got so nervous waiting for the cops to show up that he actually wet himself."

The con staff must be strict and act fast to deal with even the most minor of offenses. Says X, "I remember this one group of kids took a tampon, put ketchup on it, and dropped it off a 10 story balcony onto some people down below. They filmed it and put it on YouTube. Real mature, huh? But if someone had dropped something and it had injured or even killed someone that would have been the end of the con for good."

As the weekend drags on, and more people mingle at social events, the drama at a convention reaches a fever pitch. X says, "If you have stayed up all night for days on end, you're bound to get worn out and irritable. That's when people start picking fights with each other. I've seen actual knife fights break out at anime con dances." On the flip side of the coin, "About 10 years ago, I remember we caught some people actually having sex on the dance floor."

As more and more young women come to conventions, so have the amount of short-term love affairs, or "con hookups" as fans call them. Explains X, "Sometime I feel like actual troublemaking at cons is going down, but con hookups seem to be increasing." People may wind up coupling with someone purely based on which character they are cosplaying as. "I remember reading on a message board about this one girl who had sex at a con with someone dressed as Sephiroth (from Final Fantasy). She got pregnant, and she doesn't even know the name of the father."

Not everyone is guaranteed a partner in the con hookup game, and some male otaku take to stalking their prey in predatory fashion. While "girls dressed like Sailor Moon complaining that someone is harassing them" are fairly common, X believes that his con is safe. "We have uniformed police officers on duty all weekend long, and the attendees are aware they can find a convention staffer or a hotel staffer to escort them to their room or their other hotel if they don't feel safe." Just as often, the girls tend to act as their own security force. "Girls at cons often travel in packs and they watch out for each other. If there's a creepy guy around, they'll avoid him on their own."

Usually the system works, but X recalls one time when, "there was this drunk girl who wandered into the men's bathroom and claimed loudly at the top of her lungs that she would like someone to have sex with her. So this one guy took up the challenge and tried to steer her into the parking garage. She was so drunk she could barely walk. The whole time, they were being followed by like 18 security guards and the minute he took her into the shadows, the police moved in and busted him."

In spite of (or maybe because of) the dangers, the crime, and the craziness, X admits, "anime conventions are a fad right now and I don't know when the attendance numbers are going down." If anything their influence is actually increasing. X has come to believe that, "other cons are turning into anime cons. They have to in order to survive. If someone says 'we're having a SF convention' only 100 people will show up. If you say 'we're having an anime convention,' a thousand people will come. Even if it's a convention that has nothing to do with anime or manga, people will come expecting lots of things like cosplay and dancing."

Maybe it sounds like it could actually be a lot of fun, to party with American otaku and share in their excitement, but X admits that in the end, "these are parties thrown by people who don't actually go to parties. They're actually more like the nerd idea of what adults are supposed to do."



*NEW YORK  
COMIC CON'S  
ANIME  
GHETTO*

Photos by TREVOR WILSON

































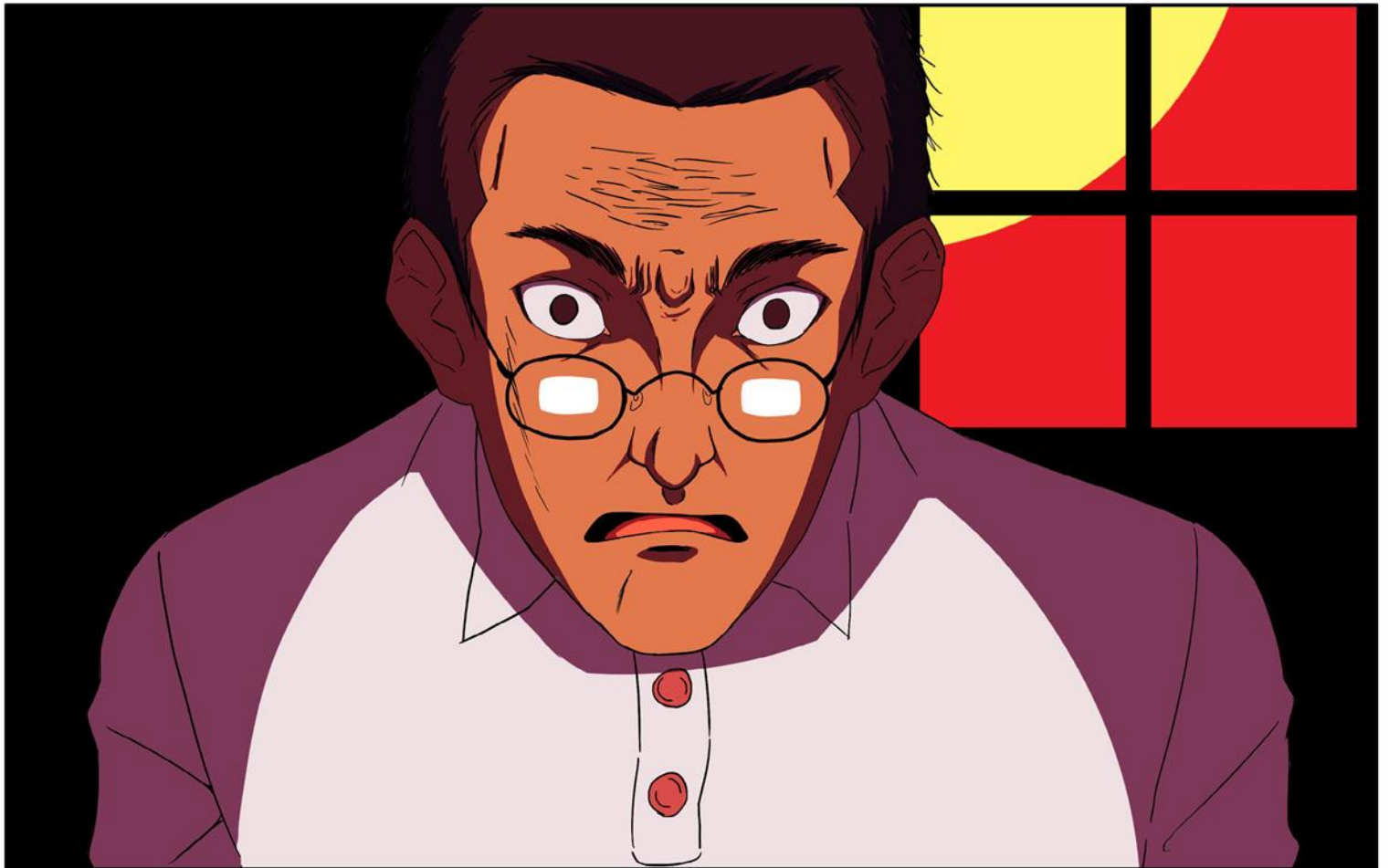
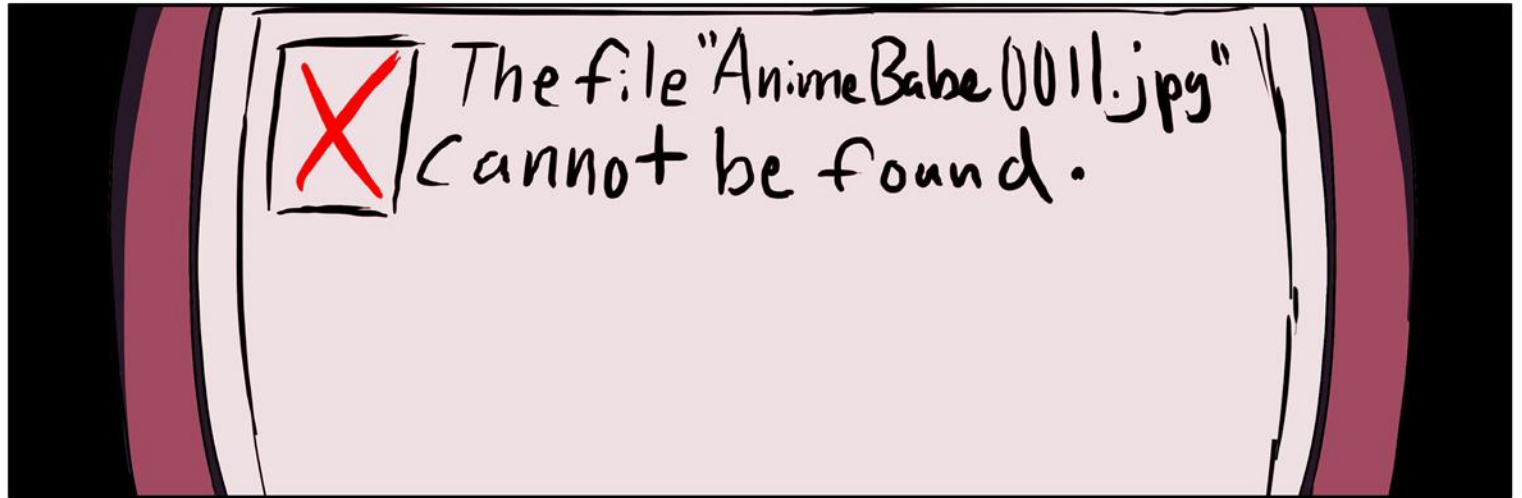














# *After APAs, Before Broadband: THE LOST DIAL-UP GENERATION.*

Words by DARYL SURAT / Illustration by WAH

There are plenty of tales of “the before time,” as Dave Wilson III would say, when fans of Japanese animation had to communicate by Amateur Press Association and trade cartoons by making analog tape copies distributed via self-addressed stamped envelopes. You hear plenty of stories of hotel rooms with daisy-chained VCRs, viewings of raw anime in some room at a sci-fi convention with one person in front verbally dictating a rough estimate of what’s being said on screen, and the Cartoon/Fantasy Organization or various other anime clubs which provided the only way for people to see Japanese cartoons once upon a time. If you haven’t, you should read Dave Merrill’s article in our first issue [*and this one* –Ed]. It’s important to preserve that history.

When you hear from these older fans, you may hear them talk about “the Internet generation” of anime fans. High-speed Internet connections in homes enabled instant global communication, streaming high-definition video that permits “simulcasts” of what just came out in Japan, peer-to-peer distribution networks, advanced desktop publishing and video/photo editing tools, manga “scanlations,” and the non-degradable nature of digital media has given rise to what Patton Oswalt described two years ago as “Etewaf”: Everything That Ever Was—Available Forever. I don’t need to go into that. You found out about this fanzine, didn’t you?

You hear plenty of stories about what it’s like to be a fan from both of those generations, but what you don’t hear so much is that there was another generation of anime fans in the gap between them. These fans don’t really fit in with the old timers or the wave of anime fans created by the mid-to-late 90s/early 2000s television broadcasts of anime or the various other “milestone” markers people set down when talking about the history of anime fans. That describes me as well as, dare I assume, much of Colony Drop: too old to be “young,” but too young to be “old.” Even at anime fan conventions attended by tens of thousands of people, that to the rest of the world have something in common with me because we’re all invested in the same medium, the reality is that there is less than 1% for whom I can conduct a meaningful nerd conversation with. Everyone else is almost wholly impossible to relate to.

Ours was a flash in the pan on the grand stage of nerd history, to be fair. There aren’t too many unique stories of historical novelty about “the anime fan experience” from this group. Maybe it’s because our fan livelihoods and experiences were a diluted amalgamation of our predecessors and successors: having one foot in each camp gave us “all of the strengths, none of the weaknesses,” or perhaps, “none of the strengths, all of the weaknesses.”

Instead, you mostly hear about the shows we watched, or perhaps some anecdotes about video stores, comic book shops, early conventions, or the other places that housed early commercial anime releases. Our “war stories” aren’t as conceptually exciting: they amount to “pretty much just like what those guys did, but...” across the board. But I truly believe that the technology available to anime fans in their early, consumption-heaviest years directly shapes the kinds of fans they become. So let’s talk about “the early dial-up generation” because I’m one of them who, in some ways, never fully caught up with the times. Why, I still don’t have Facebook! Or Tumblr!

Nearly twenty years ago, before cellular telephones and RJ45 Ethernet cables were commonplace in homes, most households had a single telephone line for the entire house. This is important because early home Internet connections were done via those same telephone lines. You’d plug a telephone line into a modem that was installed inside your computer, which in turn would “dial-up” the phone number for your Internet provider. If your tastes were more local (or...“fringe”), then you’d dial up say, a Bulletin Board System (BBS) instead. “Online” wasn’t one giant inter-connected network the way it is now.

From an infrastructural perspective, whether you were using Telnet or FTP or Gopher or IRC or whatever, going online was no different than calling somebody. It meant that if someone wanted to make a call and you were on the Internet, they couldn’t. If somebody tried to call you, they would get a “busy signal” with no option for them to leave a voice mail and no indication on your end that you had missed their call. Several modems included options to immediately terminate your Internet connection in the event someone else needed the line as workarounds for this, but back then it was an explicit choice: you’re either on the Internet or open to the rest of the world, most of whom were NOT on the Internet.

Meaning that if you were online, you were shutting yourself off from the most common form of outside communication at the time, along with everyone in your immediate surroundings.

So you’d make your phone call to the Internet Service Provider, which with any luck was within your area code because otherwise you’d be paying an additional per-minute long-distance fee. Back then, Internet usage was billed like cell phones are now: the amount of time you were permitted to be connected was limited to a finite number of minutes/hours per month, and if you went over then you’d pay a LOT more for each additional.

On top of that, the speeds were exponentially slower. The commonplace modem types of the early 90s were 9600 and 14400, so named because of their theoretical maximum bits per second. In modern terms, that means the ideal speed of the higher-end 14400 modem was 1.80 KB/s for your total uploads and downloads combined. You wouldn’t normally get that much due to things like signal noise or lag, but the point is that due to the limited time and slow download speeds, most everything you did on the Internet amounted to reading text without pictures or sound. A 100 KB GIF or JPG may be miniscule now, but that’d take a full minute or two to download then. What was relatively “an eternity” in the eyes of the old guard is “an instant” by the standards of the modern day. Multitasking was not an option; you could only focus on one thing at a time. So if you set out to read, write about, or (due to entirely different technological restrictions unrelated to computers or PC networking) watch anime, it had your undivided attention because between the limited connection time and speed, you had to choose “anime” over “everything else.”

But where would you go to do so? Early online providers such as Prodigy, Compuserve, and America Online had their own isolated communities, but I never bothered with them or the BBSes because the actual Internet had the most in-place by the time I got on. Nowadays the World Wide Web is synonymous with the Internet, but in the early 1990s the majority of focused anime discussion wasn’t on web message boards but Usenet newsgroups, specifically “rec.arts.anime.” Usenet worked a lot like the message boards of today, but for a few very significant differences: you had to stick to plain text and there were no search engines or permanent archives the way there is now. If a post was older than a few weeks, it was gone forever unless you saved it or if it was a compilation of Frequently Asked Questions that would be re-posted at regular intervals. A question that can now be answered in less than 20 seconds from start to finish (example: “how many episodes is the original *Macross*?”) could take hours to find out, if not more. You’d have to search it out such that by the time you found the answer (“36”) you’d be sure to remember it lest you have to search it out all over again. This made knowledge itself a commodity. Because you couldn’t quickly find something even if you already knew where to start looking, knowing data was much more important than knowing how to find it. No doubt this was the “you don’t always have access to a data terminal” reality of which the SV2’s second best member, Kanuka Clan-cy, spoke in episode 9 of the second *Mobile Police Patlabor* OAV... The fact that I knew she said it in that particular episode without needing to look it up online first sort of clinches my point.



It wouldn't be until about 1995 that Netscape Navigator, the first free WWW browser that didn't suck, would exist. That same year gave us Dejanews, a site that would let people search for posts and find out that Carl Horn's essays were always That Damn Good™ even in 1989. Also, that Animeigo founder Robert Woodhead was into some weird BDSM stuff. (These archives were later merged into Google and renamed Google Groups; go see for yourselves!). 1995 was also when the website portal known as the Anime Web Turnpike would be created, thus offering anime fans one destination to learn about everything. Search engines such as Altavista and Infoseek also started to come into being around the same time along with faster modems in the 28800 and 33600 bps range. These game-changing leaps in technology combined with the US syndicated television broadcast of *Sailor Moon* ushered in a whole new wave of fans that is still remembered today as having established the modern anime fan demographics. That's why their side of the "late dial-up era" story has been told and retold. The distinction's slight, but it matters.

Like so many in any age, I wanted to know about anime. I had to know about anime. But there was no way for a 12-13 year-old to find out anything about anime besides the Internet, as most anime fans and clubs were located within the college-age environment. So in my early teenage years, the years you're supposed to learn how to non-superficially relate to people, I chose the Internet over the rest of the world. Not consciously, mind you. It was more of an inadvertent choice rather than an active decision, the summary result of all the technological restrictions of the time. I just wanted to know more about all the cartoons I thought I'd never ever actually see. Have you ever visited Wikipedia to read about something really inconsequential, and then clicked on a related topic to read the article about that, then just...kept going? Then next thing you know, a few hours have passed? It's the same idea. Just replace "hours" with "evenings and weekends" to get the same amount of information...and then let those evenings and weekends cumulatively add up over the years.

What I didn't know then (or maybe I did...) that I know now is when you don't get a solid grasp on all that "love" and "empathy" stuff either during those early teen years or in college, you basically never ever will...but even if I did know that then, I still would've made the same choice anyway. Thanks to advances in technology, that's not something people need to balance between anymore: being on the Internet versus being with the rest of the world. Now the Internet is the rest of the world. With smartphones commonplace, we do always have access to a data terminal now. So it goes that the way of Takeo Kumagami has triumphed in the end: "There's no need to memorize every single bit of trivia, is there? You can get by with looking things up. What's important is being able to spot and interpret that data."

Now that the lion's share of anime knowledge is one Google/Wikipedia/IMDB/ANN Encyclopedia search away, now that anime series that ended ages ago and are years out of print are no more difficult to track down in their entirety than what aired this week, now that the act of acquiring anime itself requires neither time nor money, and now that all that's instantly available even when we're NOT sitting in front of a computer at the time, no modern anime fan need sacrifice their developmental years for the sake of this stuff. Indeed, everything I've relayed is well, completely irrelevant to the modern fan experience.

I imagine that even most people who read this fanzine won't resonate with much of this writing. You're probably thinking "why'd you have to do that? You didn't have to do that. You just chose to." And yeah, to an extent you're right. I suppose I would have been slightly behind the curve in any age. But being in the dial-up generation meant that you had to do some legwork, even if it wasn't nearly the level of work the Fred Patten's of the world had to put in. That set me on a "good intention"-paved road. To use a dated reference from an anime now over a decade old, in *Naruto* (let THAT one sink in...) the inept nerd Rock Lee who was never naturally good at anything, had to devote many years of hard work and sacrifice in order to become a supreme expert at hand-to-hand combat. And as a result, he couldn't do much of anything related to the other aspects of being a ninja. He's not very well-rounded. But all the same knowledge and then some became Sasuke's in the span of an instant. No work or sacrifice required. A single glance was all it took...because Sasuke had better "technology." The addition of that "high-speed" adjective in front of "Internet" is the Sharingan eye equivalent for fans seeking to be masters of anime knowledge kung fu today. It's all become so easy and has been this way for so long that for most it's not even worth remembering, or learning, in the first place.

The early dial-up generation of anime fans only really spans a few years in all. Most people who first got into anime then are no longer around now, even ones that were lucky enough to have better than dial-up access. There isn't really anything about the time that I look fondly back upon, the way the true old timers miss the camaraderie of establishing their connections or making a genuine new discovery. I don't want to go back to it. Any anime knowledge I acquired from then is superficial...provided I even remember it. I'm not in a position to say that coming up through that system made me a "stronger" fan than otherwise. But what the hell...I may as well make a note of it. "That happened, guys."





# *NIGHT ON THE ANIME RAILROAD.*

Words by MIKE TOOLE / Illustrations by NEMI

Ladies and gentlemen, by way of introduction: this is a piece of writing about a brief moment in time, a personal little zeitgeist. You can recount it by the fire, or at the local coffee shop. Most of the things I write— the reviews, the columns, the features, the interviews, every dumb little thing— have within them a few little mistakes. A misconstrued relationship, a few mixed up names, misspellings. Nobody's perfect. But rest assured-- not this time. That is a promise. Throughout these ten paragraphs, everything you will read is absolutely, 100% true, exhaustively researched and based entirely on solid fact.



I'm going to tell you about a surprising and unexpected collision between two great pieces of 80s lore, but before I do that, I need to talk about these two elements. The first one is *Night Flight*. Forgotten now, it was a staple of 80s cable television programming, a product of a time long before literally millions of hours of media were competing for eyeballs on Hulu and Netflix and four thousand digital cable channels. Back then, there were novel, experimental programs thrown out at late night just to fill airtime. In 1981, a pair of producers named Stuart S. Shapiro and Jeff Franklin approached the USA Network, a cable channel that was still struggling to find a popular format and fill their airtime. In addition to that, USA hadn't actually gone 24-hours yet; at the time, they signed on at 6am and ran a mixture of children's programming, movies, and sports blocks (weird stuff, too, like indoor soccer), before calling it quits at midnight. They ran sports all weekend. They needed some new toys, and Shapiro and Franklin had a great idea - a late-night variety show.

*Night Flight's* launch was timed fortuitously; Saturday late-nights were dominated by NBC's *Saturday Night Live* and its stars Joe Piscopo and Eddie Murphy, but they'd broken early for the season due to a writer's strike. On June 5, 1981, the *Night Flight* would make its debut, anchored by intriguing segments like New Wave Theatre and The Comic, and filled with a potpourri of old public domain film clips, chopped up bits of obscure comedies like *J-Men Forever*, light news programs, and music videos. The music video angle was actually a crucial way that *Night Flight* stood out early in the game-- we all know MTV dominates in that area now, but *Night Flight* had a 2-month head start on the entire goddamn network. Before MTV figured out a regular format, *Night Flight* was already including director credits and airing long-form versions of the videos. MTV was pretty selective even in the early days, but *Night Flight's* music videos were often full of blistering, shockingly original imagery. MTV, for all of its make-believe rebelliousness and edginess, refused to air the music video for Queen's "Body Language". *Night Flight* had no such reservations, about that or many other "controversial" music videos.

Another early favorite was New Wave Theatre, which shined a spotlight on rapidly rising LA bands like Bad Religion, the Waitresses, and the Circle Jerks. Manic host Peter Ivers set the tone with a constant stream of one-sided conversation, both with the bands and the audience; behind the scenes, producer David Jove made sure the acts were filmed the way they were meant to be seen, up close, with hand-held cameras. The segment was a real stand-out among *Night Flight's* early fare, and probably would have gone on for years if Ivers wasn't found beaten to death in his apartment in 1982. Without him, the show vanished, only to reappear briefly on home video in 1991-- and Ivers's murder case remains unsolved!

Before I start to bore the readers with more talk about pop culture that's older than at least half of you shits, I'll see if I can steer *Night Flight* towards a more agreeably nerdy subject. The show wasn't all about music by any means. It also employed tons of odd underground cartoons, and was regularly used as a framing device for cult feature films like *The Kentucky Fried Movie*, *Dementia 13*, and *Fantastic Planet*. Another big favorite of the show was *Dynamen*. That's right, nearly a decade before Haim Saban would introduce the American public to the mean streets of Angel Grove, *Night Flight* gave the super sentai phenomenon a home, even if it was by way of a jarringly edited parody dub. The show would occasionally experiment with hosted segments, but on the whole, *Night Flight* was narrated with smooth, upbeat enthusiasm by Pat Prescott, a golden-voiced lady who began each episode by deliriously proclaiming that it was "in stereo!!" In short, *Night Flight* was awesome, and there wasn't any goddamn thing like it on cable TV.



Then there's the other thing I need to talk about: *To-Y*. I know an awful lot of older anime nerds who have a huge boner for *To-Y*, a 1987 OVA about the life of To-Y, a rock singer as he flirts with success while trying as hard as possible not to sell out to the man. *To-Y* is based on a ten-volume manga series by Atsushi Kamijo, which is held up by Japanese manga nerds as one of the first serials about rock musicians to really pay attention to the ups and downs of being in a band; Kamijo would communicate the bracing high of playing to a packed nightclub, but also make damn sure that the guitars and amps looked right and were based on real models, and freely depicted pugnacious club owners, sleazy A&R agents, quarreling bandmates, and mishaps like stolen gear, cancelled gigs, and broken-down tour vans in his pages. This made a natural fit for the anime version, which condensed a portion of the story and set it to music by a variety of CBS Records artists.

The anime itself is a really fucking weird product of its time. It does a good job capturing the mood of Japan in the 1980s, though maybe not as good as *Megazone 23* Part 1. The music is fantastic, a gaggle of power pop tunes by bands with names like Psy-S, Gontiti, and the Street Sliders. There's practically no BGM, actually - the background music is just a continuous stream of great tunes. What strikes me as odd is that the OVA is about the life of a singer in a band, but while we get to see To-Y (and his adversary, Yoji Aikawa) sing and perform, their stuff is always overdubbed by someone else's music. It's a weird approach that somehow works in spite of itself.

The entire OVA is absolutely run through with the spirit of 1987. In one scene, To-Y's buddy Nya serves the band New Coke; in another, To-Y and his girlfriend, Sonoko, enjoy watching TV on a late-model Sony Trinitron and Aiwa hi-fi system. To-Y's band, GASP (make sure you replace the A with an anarchy symbol!) has a large following that includes both regular kids and lovingly rendered metalheads, with spiky, Aqua Net-pasted hair, chokers, and motorcycle jackets festooned with chains. And the show keeps returning to those special 80s images, like a Shoei bike late at night, hurtling through streets awash in neon hues.





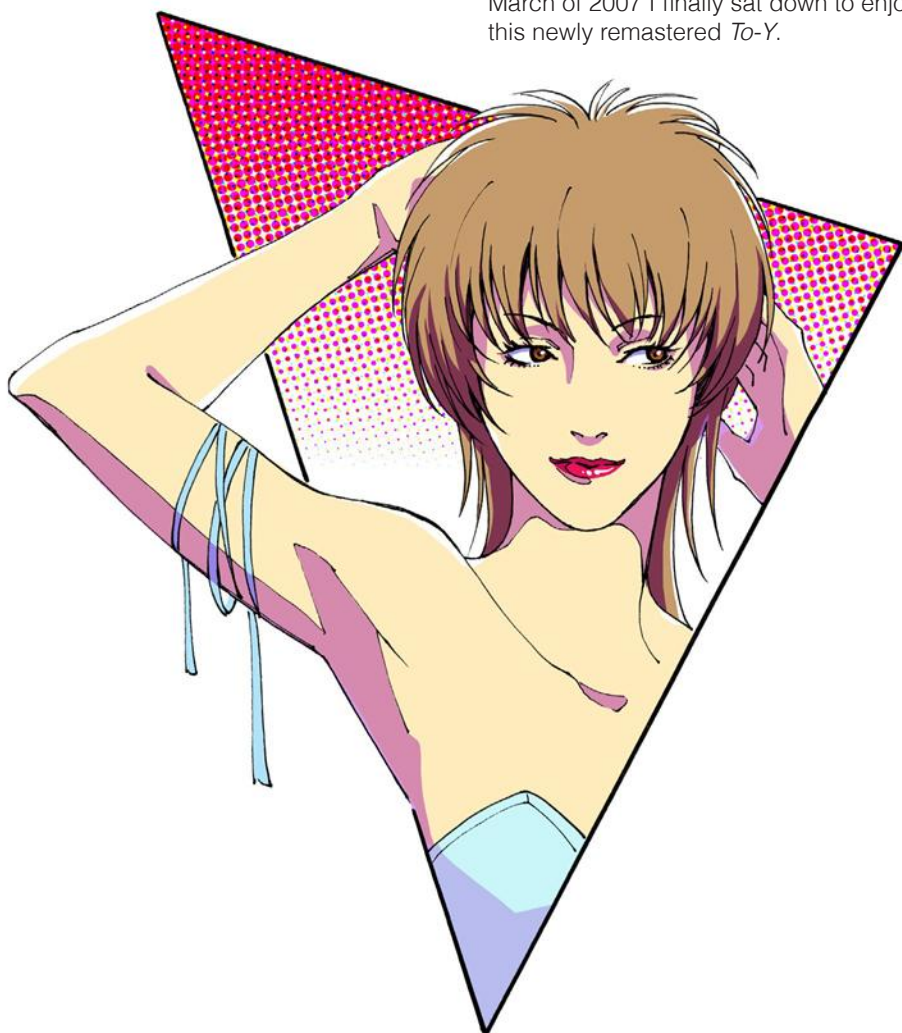
The plot itself is routine, but still fun stuff; it opens with To-Y punching his rival, Yoji, square in the face at a concert. Both are up-and-coming performers, and they know of each other through Yoji's talent agent, Ms. Kato, who's been relentlessly trying to pry To-Y away from his band. She's a classic 80s entertainment exec, chain-smoking and wearing one of those power suits with giant shoulder pads; she's convinced he'll blow up big, you see, if he'll just play by the stifling rules of Japan's jimusho entertainment biz. But To-Y isn't convinced; "I'll see you again," warns Kato, "but next time, you'll be calling me." She uses her connections to get GASP's sold out show canceled and replaced with Yoji's; on the home front, the band's bass player (what is it with fucking bass players, anyway?) is convinced that these meetings with Kato are signs that To-Y is planning to leave the band, and talks about leaving himself.

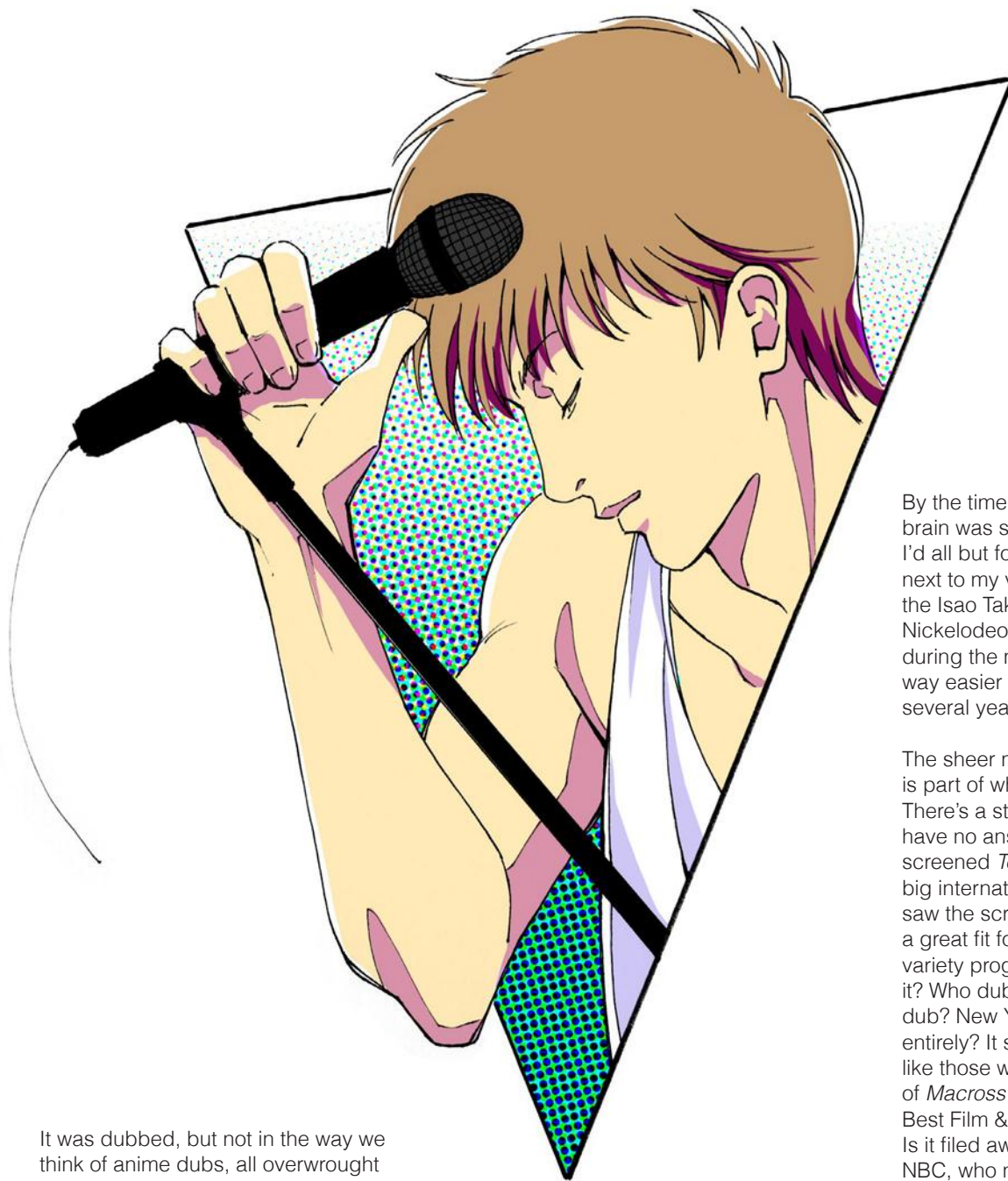
*To-Y* came out in Japan on October 1, 1987. We can safely assume that enough people bought it on Laserdisc, but not so many that they made more of it. A few of these Laserdiscs found their way westward, and the OVA was eventually fan-subtitled and distributed on VHS. A friend of mine had a copy, and while I remember eyeballing it several times on his shelf, I never got around to watching it. This was in 1997, and I didn't give it a second thought until a couple of years back, when my friend Justin Sevakis told me about an exciting project some of his old fansub pals were working on. The problem was, the *To-Y* LD release was acceptable for its time, but these discs were manufactured using a faulty process which caused them to rot and become unplayable over time. By the 2000s, most of the extant *To-Y* Laserdiscs were full of glitches from that rot, if they'd even play back. One dedicated group of fans had captured the best copy they could find and were carefully restoring it, frame by frame, to a quality that would look good on modern TVs. Naturally, I was intrigued, and in March of 2007 I finally sat down to enjoy this newly remastered *To-Y*.

As I watched it, my jaw slowly dropped. I was thunderstruck, because I realized I had seen *To-Y* before. In 1988. On *Night Flight*.

It was February, that much I remember, the weekend school vacation started. I was nearly 12 years old and loved staying up late to watch all kinds of weird crap, from softcore Cinemax porn to music videos to cult films. Even old *Three Stooges* and *Honeymooners* segments were fine by me, as long as I could crouch in the dark, my attention captured by that magical, flickering box. My parents were OK with me staying up til 10 or 11 on Fridays and Saturdays, but naturally, they wouldn't allow me to stay up past midnight, even on weekends, so most of what played on TV in the wee hours was very mysterious to me. We had a VCR at this point - two, in fact, both a sleek JVC VHS deck and a battered old Betamax warhorse that was mainly used to dub tapes rented from the video store - but I didn't employ the timer, as I hadn't worked out how to program it. (I'd figure it out a year or so later, as I went through puberty and realized that those late-nite Cinemax movies were very important and not to be missed.) But on this weekend, the whole of my winter vacation stretched before me, and so emboldened, I crept out of bed at 11:55, past my sleeping parents, and down the stairs to see what was on.

Turns out I was just in time for *Night Flight's* opening bumper, which inevitably involved the show logo flying through a darkened cityscape as Pat Prescott excitedly discussed what was coming up. I don't remember her exact words, but she talked about a new comedienne, plugged a preview of the new Richard Pryor comedy *Moving*, and rapturously described their feature for the night, "cutting edge animation fresh from Japan-- Too Why! Stay with us for plenty more music, videos, cartoons, and comedy - in stereo!" And then, *To-Y* (or, if you like, "Too Why") happened.





It was dubbed, but not in the way we think of anime dubs, all overwrought and stilted or flat and weird. Instead, it was naturalistic, sometimes almost too casual. The title character had a pleasingly sardonic voice, and I specifically remember rival Yoji chidingly saying "You got a temper, my friend," as he pointed at him in the pool hall. The songs were not dubbed, and I found them fascinating - so like our pop music, yet so different. The OVA was broken up two or three times by music videos and live segments, but the only one I really remember was the video for the Sugarcubes' "Birthday," with Bjork twirling around in a pretty white dress. So much of that broadcast stuck with me, but the title really didn't - not only did Pat Prescott mispronounce it, but it never appeared onscreen - I think they cut out the opening titles.

Years later I would discover anime, and occasionally the need to figure out what the hell I'd watched would seize me. Early on in my fandom, in the mid 1990s, there was no Google, and my occasional attempts at discovering the identity of the show using rec.arts.anime and IRC channels were never successful. I'd ask about this cool anime with motorcycles and pop music, and would invariably be pointed to either *Megazone 23*. "No, no," I'd say, "there's a rock band, the characters play in a band and one of them is weird and cute." Then I'd be pointed at *Bubblegum Crisis*. They were both great, of course, but they weren't what I wanted.

By the time Google came around, my brain was so saturated in anime crap that I'd all but forgotten *To-Y*, and filed it away next to my vague memories of watching the Isao Takahata *Heidi* movie on Nickelodeon's Special Delivery sometime during the mid 1980s. *Heidi* was way, way easier to find, and even that took me several years of patience to track down.

The sheer mystery of this production is part of why I love anime so much. There's a story to be told here, but I have no answers, only questions. Who screened *To-Y* at NATPE or one of those big international licensing shows? Who saw the screening, and decided it'd be a great fit for adult-oriented late-night variety programming? Who translated it? Who dubbed it? Was it a Los Angeles dub? New York? Or somewhere else entirely? It sounded very American, not like those weird Omni Productions dubs of *Macross* and *Locke the Superman* that Best Film & Video eventually published. Is it filed away in some dusty vault at NBC, who now own the USA Network? Does anyone know what they have? Was it ever rebroadcast? Did anyone fucking tape it?! Because I sure didn't! Blank tapes were so expensive in those days...

Someday, I'll solve this little mystery. I'll find the truth, which certainly isn't here. Until then, all I can do is watch the commercial for Sharp boom-boxes starring the *To-Y* dudes on Youtube (check it out, the boom-box can dub two tapes from CD at once!), and wrap myself up in a time that was full of endless possibilities and a neon-lit night.





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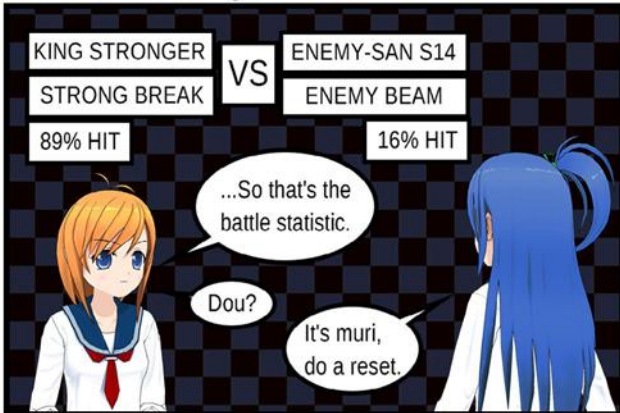
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# TREACHERY!! "SUPER ROBOT STATISTICS"

kawaiikochan.tumblr.com - @kawaiikochans



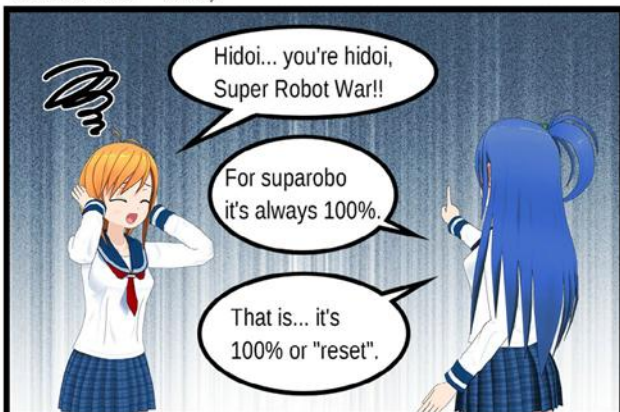
T/L Note: "dou" - how is it, "muri" - impossible



T/L Note: "sugoi" - very great

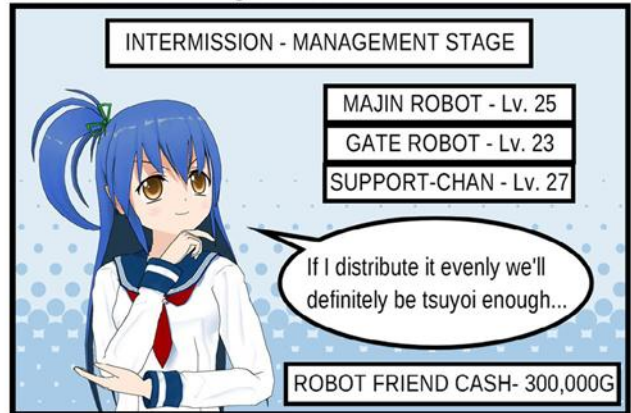


T/L Note: "hidoi" - cruelty

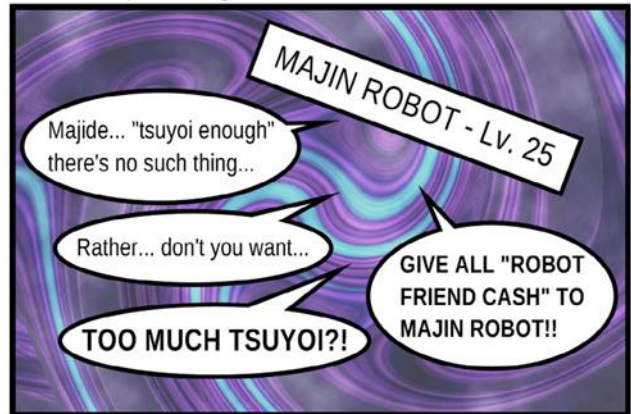


# SPREADSHEET!! SUPER MICRO MANAGEMENT WARS

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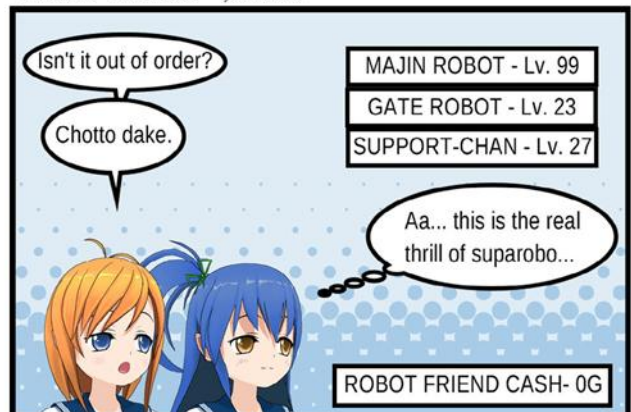
T/L Note: "tsuyoi" - strong



T/L Note: "anno" - um..., "shouganai" - whatever



T/L Note: "chotto dake" - just a little











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# LAST AMERICAN FANZINE 2

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